
Seiun wo Kakeru 6

Preparations

Fumitoshi Hizen

Chapter 75 – Entrusting Jobs

Making work preparations at his home, Eiji thought about things he had to do for today.

There were lots of them.

The newly arrived rice had just been put inside the storeroom.

The rice grains were hulled, but not yet polished.

They still had the shape of so-called brown rice.

Brown rice is higher in nutrients than white rice, which is better, especially, when considering the present food situation.

However, Eiji wanted to eat white cooked rice.

A cooked rice which is plump and fluffy.

The brightly shining and glossy rice together with its white vapor rising up.

The sweet taste that spreads whenever the rice is gobbled down with a single move of chopsticks and chewed nicely.

He wanted to experience that once more.

There are no pickled plums, so it can't be helped. I wonder if it's possible to make nori? – Eiji thought.

For eating white rice, first, it was necessary to consider a rice polishing machine.

Inside the watermill, apart from the refining device based on the use of a grinding mortar, there was also a thrusting-type mortar built.

It wasn't used that often; nevertheless, its working principle should be the same.

When rice is done being polished, it doesn't mean it can be cooked immediately.

As one would expect, an iron pot is needed for cooking rice.

Still, there were hindrances in making it.

Eiji had lots of other jobs he had to do.

Because they will perform more trades in the future, the amount of orders he received increased remarkably.

The business turned into a great success; however, once Eiji thought

about the extent of the works, he felt depressed.

Apart from being in charge of detailed works by himself, most of the burden fell to him.

At this rate, cultivation of human resources will become an urgent business, I guess.

Despite thinking so, skills weren't something that could be polished in a brief period of time.

For the time being, let's increase the amount of labor that can be entrusted to Pietro.

As long as one repeats a simple task numerous times, they will perhaps master it.

What's more, it will soon be the right time for him to entrust Pietro's job to the newcomers.

Even if they were people from the outside, Eiji didn't intend to keep them on the payroll without training them.

The villagers in Siena were aware that not doing so would go against his policy.

Both Katharina and Dante were precious pupils to Eiji.

He decided that he would take care of them til the end.

The way in which they grow independent will depend on the amount of teachings he's going to enforce on them.

Eiji's work wouldn't end with just that.

He had to slowly begin with the preparations for winter. In addition to that, it was probably necessary for him to resume the production of soap.

Despite entrusting Pietro with making the beef and goat tallow soaps, making soda water from ashes and botanical soap would be Eiji's job.

And then, there was still more.

While pondering that far, he suddenly noticed Tanya standing next to him.

– Eiji-san, your collar is standing up.

– T-Thank you.

As soon as Tanya adjusted Eiji's collar, she checked his attire.

After gently brushing his hair with a comb and slowly confirming his

appearance, she nodded contently.

- With this, you don't have to be embarrassed, even if you go out.
- It's been quite long since the last time I worked, hasn't it?
- Your disciples too, have been doing their best while you were away. So please praise them properly, okay?
- Understood. I'll give my best so that Tanya-san can eat lots of meals.
- What's your agenda for today?

Because he was asked by Tanya, Eiji checked his plans on his fingers.

- I need to give instructions to my pupils once I arrive at the workplace, and meet with Fernando with whom I made arrangements, I guess. After that, I'll resume my own job.
- When do you plan to return?
- That's right, I think it will be the same as usual.
- Expect a tasty meal upon your return.
- I'm looking forward to it.

Tanya closed her eyes as if expecting for something.

Raising her chin slightly up, Eiji put his lips close.

Their lips touched together a wee bit, and they could feel each other's warmth.

Good Morning! – a big voice was heard after a short moment.

The two of them opened a distance hurriedly as their bodies trembled from astonishment.

Once Eiji, who became flustered, turned his sight toward the voice's origin, there was Pietro standing in front of the door.

Smiling proudly, Pietro's cheeks were somewhat reddish.

Pietro lowered his head politely while maintaining the smile on his face.

- Master! Good Morning.
- G-Good Morning, Pietro.
- Morning. Pietro-kun, please don't appear out of sudden.
- Sorry, were you surprised? I too was surprised at being shown something amazing in the morning, but...
- We are husband and wife, so there's nothing strange about that.

Pietro, how is Sara-chan doing?

- T-That girl isn't related to me at all!
- She's your fiancée, isn't she?
- That's right, but, it's not like we are in love with each other.
- Still, you don't hate her, right?
- That may be so, but..... Aaahh, can we stop this talk already?

While saying so, Pietro's face turned red, which was pleasant, as he was easy to understand.

Was he just feeling awkward without holding any ill feelings? Indeed, he knew how to be completely aware of that.

If one was to point out just Pietro's age, he was no different from a middle schooler.

He was still in his bittersweet-like puberty.

Pietro didn't want to touch on this embarrassing topic any longer.

Being seen off by Tanya, they left the house.

Eiji continued his questions regarding Sara for a while.

*

Everyone have already gathered near the workshop while preparing diligently.

The only people who held keys to the workshop were Eiji and Pietro. That's because the workshop was full of valuable items, starting from raw materials and tools.

Before leaving, Eiji told Pietro not to lend the keys to others by no means.

Eiji faced toward his disciples, who were grinding and splitting charcoal, and spoke.

- Morning. It might be abrupt, but I've got some good news for you.
- Good news?
- I wonder if it's about us.
- What is it?
- I'm going to assign you to a new job.
- Ohh, we made it! Then, does it mean we will be smithing starting from today, right?
- Looks like the time for it has come. I'll be able to fully display the

potential of my iron hammer.fufufu.

Everyone, was glad that the things they could do were increasing. I too, was like that, I guess. – Eiji recalled him being a novice long ago.

Everything back then was a fresh experience for him, and he would be constantly occupied.

He would make lots of discoveries every day as a blacksmith, however, those days, which were full of surprise, will probably not come back a second time.

– Pietro will be entrusted with making a new pot. You will stretch the item using the water-powered hammer, and after that, adjust its shape using the iron mallet. I'll give you a sample of how it works, so watch properly.

– Yes! Please treat me well!

– Dante and Katharina will practice making small items, like arrowheads, fasteners, and screws. Since it is the first time for me to give you instructions, you better pay attention. If there's something you don't understand, ask about it immediately.

– Gotcha. please be easy on me.

– Please treat me well.

– For the time being, I'll teach Pietro first, so continue your previous work til I'm done.

– Roger that!

The appearance of them resuming their works seemed to be more lively than before.

Taking Pietro with him, Eiji moved toward the place used for storing already made goods.

On the shelves, there were farming tools, such as scythes and hoes, and various items, like kitchen knives, fasteners, bars, and iron mallets.

Once he took the pot into his hands, Eiji passed it to Pietro.

It was a cylindrical-type stew pot.

It's better to mass produce it at once in order to reduce the time of cooking, even if it's just a little.

– This time, I'll have you make this stew pot.

– It's quite deep inside, isn't it?

- That's because it's intended for making stew, you see. The Chinese-type pot has curves which is still too hard for you, so, I'll have you become accustomed to making curved surfaces first by making this one.
- Understood.
- Excellent, let's start making it without delay. You better watch me, okay?

Facing toward the fireplace, Eiji put the iron plate in the fire.

So as to be able to craft a thin pot, it has to be finished with less iron than it appears to have.

Obviously, the larger pot, the more material it requires and the more time it takes.

Extending the iron plate, Eiji divided it into two thin plates.

Later, Eiji would shape them into a bottom part and a cylinder-shaped part and join them together. Then, he would cover them with ashes and make them crimp.

This time, it was necessary to lower down the joining parts and apply a heated charcoal to the interior and exterior of the pot.

There were also cases in which the inside of the pot would be attached with tacks. However, for the sake of making it smooth, it was better to fuse them together completely.

Eiji continued to rhythmically strike the edges of both deeply red-scorching plates.

- During times like this, you don't have to worry about breaking their rotundity by applying too much power. That's why, just focus on adjoining them.
- Yes.

Once they are precisely connected, it will be possible to chamfer (adjust the outside surface) even after both parts become cooled.

In case the forge welding isn't performed good enough, the parts will have to be redone.

Otherwise, they will become the cause of cracks appearing during many years of use.

As soon as Eiji finished his task, he wiped his sweat, and looked at

Pietro.

It has been one month since the last time he did a proper smithing work; nevertheless, his hand was moving well.

The remaining thing would be to see how much Pietro learned from this demonstration.

– I wonder if you were able to grasp the method.

– Yes. It's fine.

– At the beginning, you use water-powered hammer without any restraint. Then, lastly, you operate with your hand carefully and swiftly.

– Yes. Can I start today without any delay and have you check for whether or not it's fine later?

– Yeah, count on me.

Leaving the rest to Pietro, Eiji decided to head toward Dante next.

Chapter 76 – The preparations for childbirth

As soon as he left the remaining work to Pietro, Eiji called together Katharina and Dante to come near the shelves.

Both of them, who wouldn't normally touch any made goods, had mostly no experience besides from entering this place.

Because of that, they looked around restlessly with their curious eyes.

Eiji took out arrowheads from the inside of the box placed on the shelves, and showed to those two people.

One of them was made by Eiji himself.

On the other side, there were as many as 10 individual arrowheads.

Those were a collection of items made not by Eiji, but by Pietro, which showed his struggles from the beginning til now.

Eiji lined up the total of 11 arrowheads on the desk.

Well then, quite a time has passed since these were done, but I wonder if they can tell the difference.

Feeling a bit expectant, Eiji began to ask a question.

– I'll have both of you make arrowheads from now on. Still, before that, I'll show you the ones made by me and by Pietro. Can you tell which is mine?

– Well, I wonder if it's this one.

– I too, think it's this one.

– Correct. What did you use to base your answer?

– The shape is beautiful.

– For some reason, it looks firmer.

The good and bad points of an item are generally things that can be guessed from their appearance.

A tool, which pursues utility, is especially, strongly inclined toward that.

Eiji grabbed the arrowhead and touched it.

A nice and cold feeling passed through his hand.

The arrowheads made by him were as thin as their heads, smooth and slender, and had pointed tips with an acute angle.

In comparison with this, the ones made by Pietro gave a somewhat dull impression.

If one follows the arrowhead with a finger while avoiding its edge, they can tell that there's even a subtly clear difference in its smooth surface.

It wasn't just the difference coming from the satisfaction with a thing's appearance but also from small observations of the touch and hue.

– This arrowhead was made at the beginning by Pietro. And then, can you notice him gradually becoming more proficient as he continued to make them?

– Haha. This one looks so poor.

– Dante, since you will also leave some of your items behind, you better do your best so as not to be laughed at by your future kouhai, just like you're doing now.

– Ugh. Are you serious...?

Good grief. Laughing at other's works won't convert into one's own growth.

Eiji and Katharina laughed as they watched Dante bending his face bitterly.

*

After assigning his pupils to their job, Eiji left the workshop temporarily.

His next destination was Fernando's working area.

As usual, the strong smell of wood shavings permeated the air, making Eiji's heart feel naturally at ease.

Once he saw a neatly cut off and evened lumber, he could understand that Fernando had certainly improved his skills as a carpenter.

I too, can't leave everything to my pupils. – he thought.

As soon as Eiji stood near the entrance, Thomas greeted him.

Unlike Fernando, who was short, Thomas was tall, to the extent of

Eiji looking up at him a little bit.

His height was probably next after Philip's and Dante's.

– Long time no see, Eiji-san.

– Thomas-kun too, have you been doing well?

– Yes. With my nagging master being absent, I was able to do my job in peace. Ah, but please keep this a secret from him.

Opposite to his height, Thomas's manner of speech was still child-like.

Eiji was taken and guided to Fernando's place.

As soon as Fernando noticed Eiji, he welcomed him pleasantly.

With his whole body being fully covered with wood dust and shavings, Eiji understood how occupied he must have been with his work.

-How's your job progressing?

– Thomas did well, but, as one would expect, there are still tasks that only I can do. How about you?

– It's a quite similar case to yours. For the time being, I'm flooded with works due to this time's trade.

– Looks like, we both have it tough.

Perhaps, the busiest people inside the village were Fernando and Eiji.

In addition to their original jobs, it was a condition similar to wearing two hats at the same time, with diplomacy being their second one.

Eiji wanted to raise a certain amount of funds before they go into hibernation during the winter. That, however, was a painful problem he had to deal with from now on.

– Would you mind if I entrust you with a job til the carpenter of Mostori arrives?

– Depends on its content. So what kind of job is it?

– I want to remodel our home. To be more precise, I want to completely divide the living space and the livestock room with a wall.

– To begin with, it was already divided.

– Yes. But, I want to convert that division into a wall.

– In that case, well, I'll modify it a bit. Still, won't it become cold during winter?

– Since the rooms are small, the heat insulation will be stronger to some extent, making the cold and warmth offset each other.

During the time of winter hibernation, the livestock's warmth plays the role of heating.

Leaving out the hygienic aspect, this type of heating reduces the necessary amount of firewood, which is greatly economical.

However, in the case of Eiji's household, the lack of hygienic conditions may pose a life-threatening danger.

– It'll soon be time for her childbirth, right?

– What about it?

– There was something I forgot to mention.... Ah, that's right.

Eiji made a simple explanation about puerperal fever.

About how immunization weakens during the time of birth, which results in the high risk of the mother's and baby's bodies falling into illness.

And especially, about the level of sanitation becoming a big problem due to the increased infection rate from living together with livestock.

Therefore, Eiji told Fernando that it's better to build a place designed for childbirth, similar to a maternity hospital.

– Will that method truly prevent death from childbirth?

– I can't say it for sure, but the situation will certainly be better than now. I can say it with confidence.

– If so, we ought to do it, I guess.

Presently, on average, out of 6 births, 2 children are expected to be able to grow into adults.

Childbirth is a big event that places a huge burden on the mother.

Provided the mother is able to deliver many children, as long her body isn't strongly built, she will be troubled by various aches.

Now that the problem of food shortage is continuously being solved, if the problem of infancy is overcome, a considerable improvement of the birth rate should be anticipated.

Because the villagers have been struggling with that, Fernando listened attentively to Eiji's proposal.

– It would be nice if we can build a facility for childbirth, but, even though we have just returned, do you have spare time?

- I wonder, when is the date for Tanya-chan's childbirth?
- I think it will be before winter.
- Then, it's not possible. There's only few months left, right?
- I guess it would be so. That's, I want to build the wall inside my house. Since the time for Tanya-san's first childbirth takes longer than other women's, I want her to deliver it in complete safeness.
-Understood. We still have some time, so once I finish my task now, I'll figure out something for your house.
- Please treat me well.
- Still, at this rate, it won't be just your household's problem, you see. There should be some other women that got pregnant this year.....

Fernando gave the names of the people.

They were names of people whom Eiji hadn't met often.

- Is it possible for you to work on all the houses?
- Hm, I wonder whether or not I should try to increase my number of subordinates. Whichever case it is, if you say that more children are born, I guess carpenters will be indispensable in a long-term view.

Because a specific number of children dies every time, the number of a family remains fixed. When a household grows in size, perhaps it will even be necessary to extend the houses.

Assuming it does, they will have to build the houses whether they like it or not.

- I too, will negotiate with the tribal chief over that matter.
- I guess it has to be Eiji-kun whenever the amount of labor grows.
- It's just like you say it is.

Being told so, Eiji could do nothing but admit it.

Eiji, who was in charge of planning the project, also felt troubled, but nevertheless, there seemed to be no end to Fernando's pains as he was mostly following.

Being grateful, Eiji bowed down in front of the man to whom he had caused most of the hardships, apart from Tanya.

Chapter 77 – The preparations

Whoosh whoosh- The sound of the wind spouting out from the pair of bellows reverberated.

Each time it happened, the charcoal would turn faintly redder and brighter together with the heat rising up.

Eiji was swinging with his iron mallet while being alone in the workshop.

Without any signs of anybody around, the sound of the mallet echoed inside the dim place.

His pupils went back earlier than usual.

He didn't intend to let Pietro have anything to do with weapon making nor, obviously, Dante and Katharina, who arrived from Nazioni.

Eiji decided that creating weapons will be exclusive to him alone.

He placed his trust in Pietro's ability to keep a secret; nevertheless, there was a high possibility that the young Pietro will expose the information unintentionally through his actions.

There's no telling if someone holding distrust would appear from somewhere, were he to neglect any small detail.

Perhaps It was necessary to pay close attention.

Not being able to learn through observation is a waste, however, there are cases when learning by oneself goes faster.

Doing one's job while teaching and giving instructions to others is quite tough.

At least, if they don't improve their basic skills a little more, Eiji probably won't be able to entrust them with his job.

– But, in the end, I'll be in a trance-like state when making something, I guess....

Eiji put a self-mocking smile on his face.

Despite him harshly refusing to make weapons, whenever he finds himself at the stage of crafting something, he would become lost in his work.

An artisan is really a person of cause and effect.

Such a person will want to convert his joy of making items into all possible things.

The first weapon that Eiji decided to make for his self-defense was a spearhead.

Because they are intended to be used during a special occasion, like wolf extermination, a thorough understanding of its work process and vital points will play a big role.

Despite blacksmiths and tool makers having skills, making weapons that are outside of their area of expertise is difficult. However, utilizing one's small experience of making something similar may contribute in grasping the vital points of making weapons.

Again, a long-range weapon can keep a further distance between opponents in comparison with a Katana, and is probably more likely to become the main force on the battlefield.

Since he entrusted his disciples with making arrowheads, Eiji himself focused his full power on crafting things which only he could make.

Eiji intended to make a big spear for a person with a large body like Philip by centering its shape around an Omi no Yari.

The amount of steel material used would increase rapidly, but nevertheless, Eiji decided to overlook that fact on this occasion.

The mining is making good progress thanks to Dante and the rest, isn't it? – he thought.

Evening is the best time for a blacksmith to swing with his arm.

The red-dyed sunlight will clearly display the color of the heated steel.

Were it to be dazzling broad daylight, this wouldn't work.

Eiji made mild steel one after another.

All of them had a similarly perfect shape, just like they were measured with a ruler.

If one were to line them up, their difference would probably be less than 1mm.

That's because doing the same things constantly will increase one's work efficiency.

A mild steel is a mild steel, and a steel is a steel. They both should

undergo many procedures, such as heating, quenching, and annealing.

Should I start making same items every week? – Eiji thought.

– Is there someone here?

Suddenly, he noticed someone's presence.

Turning around, he looked for the person.

Normally, he would only hear the sound of the workshop.

Eiji interrupted his work and looked over the interior.

There was no trace of a person hiding, even in the cover.

If so, could it be the entranceway, or the windows?

Both of them were opened in order to let light come in.

– Indeed, that's strange.....

There was nobody in either of these places.

However, Eiji certainly felt someone's presence.

Just who had approached this workplace, and what was that person's aim?

Eiji took advantage of him reaching the point where he could rest, and extinguished the fire.

Then, he properly locked the entranceway.

With the lock being steel-made, it wasn't something that could be easily broken under normal circumstances.

With this, it should probably be safe for now.

Forgetting about that person's presence for the time being, Eiji was thinking about the plan hereafter.

When it comes to war preparations, it isn't just fine to weapons.

Food provisions, protectors, and constructing defensive facilities were also among the preparations necessary.

That's why, items that are meant to protect one's body will as well be necessary.

Nevertheless, it's also possible to create and improve those without using iron as their main component.

Shall I entrust Tanya-san with the instructions and have that made as next?

As a matter of fact, everything that is required to make it is fully set. The remaining thing would be to change the manner of operations. While pondering about various things, Eiji got on his way back home.

*

As soon as he returned, Tanya was waiting for him with an already prepared meal.

Because Eiji would continue to smith in the evening, their meals were taken later than in other households.

For that reason, they would have to use extra oil to light their house, which was a bit severe for their pockets.

Once Eiji came back, they immediately started eating.

– So with that, Eiji-san will from now stay alone in the workshop, right?

– Yes. I'll be working overtime. I decided to tell you ahead of time so as not to cause any misunderstanding this time.

– I'm sorry about that time.....

– Ah, no. I didn't mean to bring it up again, but you see, that's not the point. If you encounter Pietro or the other pupils, please don't tell them anything, even if you are to be asked.

– Understood. I won't tell anyone.

Seeing Tanya, who nodded decisively, Eiji felt at ease.

For Eiji, even if he was to hold military power, he wouldn't want to resort to a war.

Building up their stockpile in secret, growing into a comparable military power that can't be capsized by others, and gaining their independence through decisive actions was the best method.

Some may say that he's naïve, but Eiji wanted to avoid the death of those in his close surroundings more than anything.

It wasn't something that could be treated as human affairs where people's death would be learned from television or newspaper in remote places.

If a war takes place in this village, people, who have been close to him, will die one after another.

And that could also concern Eiji himself.

Considering all of that, the most vital thing would be not to let their secret leak out.

- Still, those people have been performing really well.
- Yes, I too will admit that. After all, they are pupils who have lived under my guidance.

Back in the medieval times, pupils would take care of their master's home, which was considered an obvious thing. Even now it's the same regardless of whether it's east or west.

There are also examples left in the surviving documents where certain guilds would deliberately ban the exploitation of pupils by their master's wife in their agreements.

Tanya, who was also pregnant, could request aid from her surroundings.

Just that fact alone made Eiji concerned about her behavior.

- Speaking of which, Eiji-san.
- What?
- Katharina-san said that she would like to have a bra, but...
- Ah, she probably needs one, I guess.
- Since I'm thinking of trying to make it, won't you tell me its method?
- If you like, I can make i—ah, no! It's nothing. Please do so, Tanya-san!
- All right.

S-Scary—

Just before Eiji tried to suggest him making it, Tanya's eyes emitted a dangerous light.

Even though, a while ago, she had a smiling face, Eiji wanted her to stop having a serious look out of nowhere.

He would touch Tanya's chest numerous of times under the pretext of size measuring, so his fondness of chests was well known to her.

Katharina's breasts were also unusually abundant.

Certainly, it would be better for her to have a bra.

- Well then, shouldn't Tanya-san too have a brand new bra?
- I guess so. Is it because of my tummy growing big? Recently, it has grown bigger again, to the extent of me being unable to adjust

the hook.

– I'll make Tanya-san's bra, so please make another one for Katharina in the same manner.

– Please do so. I wonder if Eve-san and Adele-san are fine without having one....

Just as she said, Eiji recalled Philip's and Fernando's wives.

Hm..... I think they would be okay even without one, and there should also be no problem in terms of fashion.

However, perhaps they wouldn't mind if he was to prioritize other things first.

Eiji refrained from giving a clear reply.

– First, shouldn't we begin with yours?

– Let's do so.

There was no end to the topics of their conversation.

Even after finishing the meal, they continued their pleasant talk.

Chapter 78 – Information Gathering

Using a chisel, Eiji opened holes, one after another, in a long metal plank.

The interval between holes was fixed.

The size of the holes continued to change gradually from a big circle into a small one.

The plank was, by itself, thick and unusually solid.

Because of the large amount of carbon inside the plank, its hardness was exceedingly high.

This means that lots of effort is needed to open the holes.

After the holes are opened with the chisel, it's necessary to adjust them little by little with a file. However, if too much power is applied onto a solid metal, which can't be easily scraped off, it will be more difficult to make small adjustments. In the end, patient, slow operation with the file is the best method.

Once he took the plank into his hands and confirmed the size of the holes with a scrutinizing eye, Pietro followed Eiji's example as he stared at the plank similarly.

And then, Pietro tilted his head.

Perhaps, he couldn't understand what Eiji was doing.

- Master, what are you making this time?
- I'm crafting wire.
- Is there any relation between wire and this plank?
- A big one. How about you try it later?
- I'll do it!
- Master, is it fine for me to make it as well?
- Let me do it too.

The disciples probably overheard Eiji's and Pietro's talk.

Katharina and Dante also drew near.

What about your job? – Eiji wanted to ask, but nevertheless, it was a good thing that they were craving for skills.

In the end, he only stared lightly at them.

Since explaining them at once is less time consuming, Eiji thought it was fine.

And if it's a simple work, then all the more reason.

Dante and Katharina put a wry smile on their faces while getting impatient. Perhaps, it meant that they won't repeat their mistake a second time and will focus on their tasks from now on.

– Shall I first show you how it's done? After all, this job isn't something that requires unique skills.

– Is that so?

– Then, it's alright for me as well, right?

– Yeah, but it's probably easier to use less power at the start.

– Then, I guess it's my turn now.

– It isn't something that can't be done by anyone, so I'm going to show you quickly.

Saying so, Eiji installed the metal plank onto the pillar in front of the shaft that stretched out from the water wheel.

Once the plank was tightly fixed with screws, Eiji pulled on it so as to confirm it was solidly attached, however, it didn't move an inch.

– Won't it move if I use my power?

– How about you try it and see?

– Yeah!.....U-Urr...Hurrr

– Alright, that's enough. it will become troublesome if you get serious and destroy it, so you better stop.

–Damn, guess it can't be helped. I'm wasting my time on this. I'll tell you, but, I wasn't using my full power, ok? *sigh*.....

– Really, Dante-kun is acting like a funny person, isn't he?

With his full power, he would probably pull it off.

Holding his breath, Dante's face had flushed red. Despite that, the fixed plank wouldn't move.

There was nothing wrong about his strength.

With this much strength, he should probably be fine with most jobs.

Dante and Katharina were exchanging words with each other, but, Eiji continued his task while ignoring them.

Being on good terms is a good thing.

Continue to get along like that, guys. – Is what Eiji thought, but he didn't utter those words.

The next thing he brought was a steel material.

So as to make a wire thin enough to pass it through the holes, the metal would be flattened using water-powered hammer.

– First, use this. Pass this steel material through a hole in the plank. You see, only its head needs to be barely passed through due to its size. And then, grab it with pliers. Once you do so—pull it with all your strength!

Eiji braced his legs and concentrated his strength into both of his arms.

Gigi! – a sound was produced as he felt a strong resistance in his hands.

The steel was dragged out through the hole while being stretched.

By forcibly passing it through the hole, the steel became thinner and balanced in its thickness.

– Speaking of which, once there's a little more than just the tip, use the machine. You tie this up to the shaft's protrusion in the water wheel and rotate it using the water wheel.

Guon guon – the water wheel generated sounds.

As the shaft revolved, its powerful force continued to pass the steel through the metal plank and coil it in succession.

In the past, it would be passed through iron holes, whereas, in the present times, there were methods called the drawing process and wire drawing.

The process would be repeated several, several tens of times, til the steel achieves the desirable wire diameter.

There was also a technique called surface finishing, which developed together with the introduction of automation; nevertheless, the basic principle of making wire would remain the same.

Before it was possible to make use of the water wheel's power, blacksmiths would do the whole work relying solely on human strength. Therefore, Eiji could do nothing but admire those people's strenuous effort.

Just how much perseverance does one need to perform this work without any tool for it.

The wire continued to coil and become thinner on the shaft, than at the beginning. As soon as Eiji confirmed it was done, he halted the wheel.

After he retrieved the wire, he inserted its head once again through the plank.

The hole this time was next to the previous one, and was slightly narrower.

– With that, well, it feels more or less like this.

– Master, I have a question.

– What is it, Pietro?

– What do we use such a thin string for?

– Hm? I wonder if it would be good for a bra.

– Ah, Tanya-san's.....

– Right, right. You understood it well, didn't you? H-Hey, what's the matter. Why are you giving me that 'again?' face?

– No way, Master. There's no reason for me to make such a face.... right?

– Because you're getting the wrong idea, I'll correct what I said. A wire can obviously be used not only for that. It has a wide range of usage, such as making light baskets, becoming a building material or a hanger. And most importantly, for making nets! With this you can grill more delicious fishes!

Recently, Eiji had the feeling that his disciple's respect for him had weakened.

Even though Pietro's eyes glittered the first time Eiji told him about making a bra.

In order to win back his respect, I've got to show him my good side from now on. – Eiji thought.

If a bra is no good, then how about shorts...?

No, I get the feeling that would just worsen the situation.

Actually, the application of the wire doesn't end with just making a bra or daily necessities.

Eiji planned to use it for making single-layer kimonos and barbed wire, however, there was no way for him to tell them that.

He wanted his disciples to continue producing raw materials while having them believe that they're intended for something.

Thinking back on his behavior, was his way of teaching possibly too self-serving?

I'm making myself be hated, I guess. – Eiji thought.

It would be better to keep that unpleasant feeling to himself.

If they at least manage to create useful things for other people by learning this skill, then it's okay, but.....

At the time Eiji was watching them attentively, his disciples began their practice while striving to be the first to finish.

Despite there only being a slight strength requirement for this type of job, as one would expect, Dante's strength seemed to be the most suitable for it.

Eiji suddenly thought.

Speaking of which, whose presence did he sense before?

If they had been his disciples, then it would've been fine for them to say a word and enter confidently. There was no need to sneak and peek.

Since there is a distance separating Eiji's work spot from the door and louver windows, nobody should be able to see exactly what he was making.

The fact that he didn't know whose presence was it left an unpleasant feeling inside his heart.

*

As soon as Eiji finished his job and got on his way back home/and started going home, a voice was heard calling him to halt.

Once he checked its direction, it was Mike.

He was together with his beloved dogs. Unlike humans, dogs can grow big quickly.

Was it because of Mike feeding the dogs properly? – The two hunting dogs each had a large build, which one could describe as unbelievable.

- Eiji. We will soon begin to cut down on livestock for winter preparations once again, but can we work together on the tallow like last time?
- How much is there going to be?
- This year, just as you told us, we have turnips and clovers. That's why, it seems we only need to make a third of what we made the previous year.
- Will there be enough food for winter?

Because there wasn't enough fodder to supply food for the animals during winter, til now, they couldn't help but to decrease the number of livestock, and make them into food.

However, the four-crop rotation continued to show its result.

If the livestock can survive winter, that fact itself will produce less effort, and it will be possible to make animal breeding more prosperous, again.

If one is to consider that in a long-term perspective, the number of livestock will certainly increase a lot; nevertheless, the first 2-3 years will perhaps contrarily result in a food shortage.

Were the amount of food to be insufficient due to them sparing the livestock, it would be the same as putting the cart before the horse.

At Eiji, who expressed this concern in his question, Mike denied it by waving his hand from side to side.

- Yeah, about that, we have lots of dried cod, so you don't have to worry. If it's necessary, we will cut down on how many sheep there are, so as to balance the accounts.
- I see. Well then, it might be troublesome for you, but can I have you finish the separating salt as well?
- Got it, leave the grinding to me.

Sheep are originally one of the easiest livestock to be raised.

If one was to look into the history records, sheep were animals that became successfully domesticated after dogs.

Mike moved with his hand in a way that indicated chopping with a knife.

Nodding decisively, Eiji put his hand on his chest while making a sigh of relief.

- This year, we have lots of olive oil, so we will monopolize it by ourself. We shall save the beef tallow soap, which is easily applicable for industrial purposes, for Nazioni and trading.
- I entrusted the production to my wifey.
- Jane-san's cooperating with us, so she will certainly deliver high grade products to us, I guess. As always, you're one devoted husband, ain't you?
- Shut up.

Eiji felt pleasant at Mike, who turned bashful.

Constantly thinking about his wife while saying this or that, Eiji thought that Mike was a good person.

The main component of the soap was olive oil, however, depending on what kind of oil is added as a substitute, the qualities of the soap will change.

The famous Aleppo soap and Marseille soap use olive oil as their base component.^[1]

Starting with the supervision of the disciples, Eiji threw a range of jobs at Pietro. For that reason, there was a risk of him overworking.

Pietro had the personality of a diligent worker, but nevertheless, he was still a boy whose body, too, wasn't completely forged.

Most likely, Eiji have to come up with a counterplan of entrusting the soap making to someone else.

For the time being, he decided to make the soap by himself using the olive oil.

Were he to entrust all his disciples with its production during the daytime, they would probably not have the spare time to even fuel a burning furnace.

Perhaps it would be fine for him to craft items in the morning and evening time, and work hard on the soap production at noon.

At Eiji, who was thinking about the next plan, a voice from the distance called out.

It was a hoarse voice of a man.

Looking with a distant view, Eiji couldn't clearly tell who it was, but nonetheless, the man seemed to be riding on a horse carriage.

It was a voice which he could recognize from before.

As the source of the voice drew nearer, it became clear who it was.

That was Jean, the peddler.

Eiji felt it had been long since he cashed in on the soap.

So it has been a year since that time?

– Eiji-kun, I brought you things you requested.

Jean stopped the carriage while smiling with a grin.

Notes

1. Obviously Marseille soap is not. It's made from vegetables. Author's ignorance.

Chapter 79 – The Soap

Negotiation, Again

The needle became extremely thin after being pulled out from the smallest hole in the metal board, and at the end, it looked as thin as a thread.

With this, it will be possible to make a wire netting with eye-holes

It was also the first time for Eiji himself to make a wire netting using a wire.

However, it was also not the sort of a job a blacksmith would do under normal circumstances.

Therefore, yesterday, it was decided that all the members would be making it together inside the workshop.

First, they were going to fix two thin poles, so as not to allow them move horizontally.

Even attaching them to protrusions on the left and right side of a wooden frame would be fine.

Using the pole to fold back, once a single wire is made to go back and forth, a vertical shaft of the wire netting will be created.

The next step would be to hold one more wire and pass it horizontally.

The point of doing so is similar to using a loom, where the wires intersect with each other after a single pole is inserted in.

After the horizontal axis has been passed through, the wires will naturally start to cross over each other.

With the wires being brought close together and properly by hand, the gaps will disappear.

At such time, if the wires aren't brought close to each other carefully, in order to create proper and equal intervals, the wire netting will lose its functionality as a good filter. Instead, it will let foreign matter slip through.

As one would expect, when letting others do such a job, the difference in their strong and weak points will show up in practice.

Was Dante unable to stomach his compact movements? He would frequently stir up his head's hair while complaining.

The moment Eiji tried to talk him, Dante made an expression as if being exhausted.

– I'm not good with minute works like this one. Don't you have any similar job that requires using power?

– Weren't you greatly flourishing yesterday when we were making wire?

– Yes Yes, I'm talking about that.

– Still, if you continue to do only simple tasks like that, you will end up being used by others without leaving a mark as an artisan.

– Ugh, that would be troublesome, I guess.

– Even blacksmiths have lots to do. From now on, it's fine for you to wait and look forward to a job that will involve using strength.

Despite his grumbling, Dante didn't stop working with his hands.

Even though he complains about this and that, his attitude of carrying out works til their end gave a favorable impression.

At any rate, the almost 2m tall, stern man with a wrestler-type of body was weaving a wire netting with small movements while holding a slightly larger than 1mm wide wire.

Seeing how Dante was performing his job, Eiji couldn't help but to feel a sense of discomfort.

If someone was to be in Dante's shoes, that person would probably as well want to mutter a single complaint.

Do your best, me! – As he called out to himself, Dante increased his working pace despite getting annoyed once again.

He was an unexpectedly adorable fellow.

Were he to be able to choose humbler words, Eiji wouldn't have anything to say against him. However, were it to happen, Dante wouldn't probably be the Dante he knew.

– Masteeer, please pay attention to me as well.

– Hm, yeah. Katharina-san....has become quite skillful, haven't you? Ain't you more apt for detailed works like this one rather than me?

– Is that so? Yay!

Katharina, who had an honestly delighted face, grabbed his hands.

Oh, her hands have become a bit more solid. – Eiji thought.

Perhaps it was due to her giving her best every day when striking with her mallet.

Unlike the first time when she first started her work, light blisters began to appear on her hands' palms and fingers, like an octopus.

Thanks to her accustoming herself to using leather-made gloves and apron, Eiji didn't feel any need to worry.

Katharina was probably starting to get familiar with smithing than her dyeing job, little by little.

What's more, was it due to the job being enjoyable? Her natural, smiling face would appear more often.

There were many occasions on which her charming face would make Eiji's heart skip a beat.

Of course, in terms of being a blacksmith, she was still wet behind the ears.

However, as if being able to take a glimpse into their growth, Eiji was glad.

Once the wire mesh was finished, the preparations were done.

The one who had most experience in making soap was Pietro.

Not losing to the stench coming from the process of making soap, Pietro was an exceptional help when he thoroughly carried out the task last year.

This year, Eiji decided to have Pietro acquire the full knowledge of soap making. Together, they went to make lye, which was one of the component needed for that process.

He also didn't mind having Katharina and Dante help out afterwards.

The most important thing would probably be concealing the mix ratio for the soap.

– Excellent, then, shall we start?

– Yes. What are we going to do first?

– We'll mix water together with ash and filter the mixture.

– Understood.

Following Eiji's instructions, Pietro carried the ash from a container into a barrel, and continued to pour water inside.

Recently, thanks to trading with Tal village, the number of tortoise shell increased in comparison with barrels.

Just like the previous year, there was a faucet installed at the bottom, and this time, Eiji decided to use the wire netting as the filter.

- Master, is it fine for me to receive some soap this time?
- Of course. What's with the sudden question, though?
- No, I don't particularly need it, but.....ehm, that girl, Sara, she says she wants to become clean....

Turning away, Pietro's face continued to dye itself red.

Sara was Bernardo's daughter, and the same time, his fiancée.

Despite Pietro refusing at every turn about him being fond of her before, perhaps considering a gift for her could be the proof of his relationship improving a bit.

- Is that so, is that so?
- Ah, Master, you're enjoying mocking me again, ain't you?
- No, that's not true. Still, in that case, you better make and give her something nice, I guess.
- Ain't you making too much of a smiling face there?!

Eiji became aware of his face losing composure.

He himself disliked being made fun of, because of that, he didn't want to cause any unpleasant feeling to another person as much as possible.

However, Eiji asked himself about the reason why he enjoyed bittersweet love stories of other people.

- Speaking of which, is your relationship with Sara is going smoothly?
- Well, it does.....to the extent of making us wonder whether or not a ceremony will be held next year.
- Congratulation. You better make the necessary preparations from now on, so as to make that event as glamorous as possible.
- It seems to be quite a big deal since Master says it takes a whole year to do the preparations, but...
- No, I don't mean it that way. By the way, do you plan to leave your house once you're married?
- Yes. I think we are going to move into a new house.
- Is that so?

In that case, it probably wouldn't be a big burden for Eiji to make them at least a set of cooking tools

Or perhaps, it would be better to have Pietro forge them by himself? When it comes to a congratulatory gift, giving Pietro more opportunities to practice his skills in making still-unlicensed products would be the best present for him.

Also, letting him choose what he, himself, wants to make wouldn't be a bad idea.

Providing he decides to make cooking tools by himself, it should be fine for Eiji to create something else instead and present it to them.

Even though it's still too early for that, I have to consider that fact now, I guess. – is what he thought.

*

The production of the soap went favorably.

A botanical soap based on the use of unprecedented oils, such as olive oil and grapeseed oil.

An animal soap made from animal fat, like cattle, pigs, boars, and sheep.

And then, a mixed soap that utilized waste oil.

Among these, only the botanical soap needs to be solidified with salt in order to be completed.

There was no particular problem about using soaps with a liquid form.

Nevertheless, unless it's hardened, it won't be easy to transport it during a trade.

What's more, those are high grade items.

The black pepper was once rumored to be a proud item with a value equal to a single gold coin. This high-grade soap would most likely not reach such an extent, but nonetheless, it would probably obtain a corresponding price.

The target clients were tribal chiefs with their spouse, and feudal lords, like Nazioni with his wives.

The animal soap would possibly be collected in the form of taxes by Nazioni, as well as become a core product of future trades.

Since the number of killed livestock decreased in comparison with the last year, the produced amount of soap would also fall.

The reason why the production hasn't dropped sharply was thanks to Jean supplying them with oil from killed animals. Recently, his gathered oils consisted mainly of this. Like that, Eiji was able to continue his soap making.

The last soap made from wasted oil had an oxidized stench which was impossible to be completely eliminated even with the salt alone. However, it would probably amount to be used for other industrial purposes.

Especially, inside Siena, on things like cog wheels from the water-powered hammer. Because the industry in the village was anticipated to strongly develop, they could use the soap by themselves.

Eiji lined up all the soaps in front of Jean and showed them to him.

On the other hand, Jean wore a daring expression on his face.

Perhaps he has already earned more than enough this year.

– This time, you won't be able to dictate your rules smoothly like in the previous year. After all, Mostori already has a lot of soap in reserve.

– First, I shall to hand you these soaps as a form of payment for the oils and minerals you brought the previous time.

-..... Oh. To think that you would do something like this.

Ten tortoise shells filled with wasted oil were exchanged for one of soap.

If one hadn't considered Jean's pay, it would've become an extraordinary profit with just 10% of the cost price.

I wonder if it's just natural for a monopoly product to have an interest rate – Eiji thought.

Following what he thought, Jean recorded the interest rate of the soap on a wooden plank.

Despite him not being very literate, he could actually use letters.

What he wrote down were symbols for "wheat", "sheep", and lots of numbers related with taxes.

The numerals were based on a decimal system.

Among those who could use the letters were the government official, Frank, and the peddler, Jean.

And then, there was the shrine maiden and wife of Fernando, Adele, who was acquainted with writing.

Eiji, too, was told a few things about the letters.

Because most of the used numerals and letters were basic ones, he had no problem remembering them.

Apart from that, he would normally use Japanese for recording things.

Still, during an occasion like this trade, Eiji tried to resort to the local's writing.

– And then, this is our new product, a candle!

Brimming with self-confidence, what Eiji brought out was a candle created from a beeswax.

As establishing beekeeping hadn't been successful yet, the candle was a limited item made from beeswax naturally gathered inside the forest. However, its light was several times stronger than the light of the fire on an oil tray.

Eiji deliberately took Jean to a dark place and lit the candle in front of him.

Seeing how it worked in practice, Jean twitched his muscles on his face and began to hold his head in pain.

–Oi, wait a moment.

– What?

– I beg you, stop inventing new things one after another. We, too, have to consider plans for raising our budget.

– Then, shall we leave the candle for another time?

– No, wait wait! there's no way for me to refuse buying after being shown something like this in front of my eyes. I would be a failure as a peddler.

– I see. Indeed, there are those who are willing to buy what they desire no matter what the price is. It also seems to be something that Pierro-san would want to have at all cost. Then, what will you do? There's no guarantee there will be any of this left until next time.

– Understood...I'll buy it.

Once Eiji wrote down a number on a wooden tag, Jean's face turned

pale.

Considering Mostori's income and expenditure with this village alone, they were clearly in the red.

Despite them possibly being able to resell Siena's products at a high price to other villages, the amount of their expenditure was most likely tough on them for the time being.

In the end, Jean spent a part of his golden coins he had with him.

With this, I should be able to present Tanya-san with some nice ornaments, I guess. Should I also give some to Katharina from time to time? – Eiji thought.

– I've....lost again? Or perhaps, won? I don't understand anymore.

Toward Jean, who made a troubled face, Eiji smiled positively and said.

– Thanks for your continued patronage.

Chapter 80 – Franko's Inspection (first part)

A warehouse was present.

In its surroundings, there were trees standing in a row and the field of vision was bad.

Most likely, nobody could spot this warehouse unless they knew about this place. Such were Eiji's thoughts.

It was inside of a forest where the Goddess of Abundant Crops lay dormant.

A place with bottomless swamp, where no one could return alive once they stepped inside.

Because of that, what was obvious to villagers was the fact that nobody would dare to step inside from fear and respect.

One would have to go around the swamp so as to reach the warehouse built deep inside.

If a person had no knowledge about a particular small path, the place would, by no means, stand out when seen from the main road of the village.

It was probably the best place to hide something.

The inside of the warehouse was filled with wheat.

All of it was gathered from a harvest in the middle of July and recently threshed.

Primarily, they were things that were supposed to be inspected by Franko.

That's to say, the wheat hidden inside this warehouse was proof of tax evasion.

At last, the senbakoki was made known to the village.

The tool was, by all means, essential for shortening the time of threshing as much as possible.

If the warehouse is spotted, it will be treated as a serious crime. Obviously, neither Bona nor the village executives will be of any help if that happens.

And perhaps, not even Eiji himself.

For that reason, those present here had to pay the greatest attention to even the slightest detail, including the coming and going to the forest.

Bernardo and Giorgio were leading the way.

– Is this, all? I hope there's nothing left to pack.

– Don't worry. Still, to think it was possible to store this much wheat. It wouldn't even cross my mind.

– Right right. Good grief, that's our gracious Eiji for you. Ain't you honestly a messenger sent by the Goddess of Abundant Crops?

– Please stop it. I'm not anyone important like that.

– That modesty of yours is cool as well.

– Right, if it was Giorgio, he would be getting extremely arrogant or digging holes in the earth, with his head, by this point.

– What sort of attitude, is that? Hey, both of you please keep silent. What will we do if we get spotted by any chance?

– Oh, hush up.

Bernardo and Giorgio watched over the surrounding and closed the door to the warehouse.

After Eiji shut the lock, he checked whether or not it was locked properly.

With the implementation of the 4-crop rotation system, the amount of

harvested crops was originally expected to fall a certain extent at first, however, instead, a large and unprecedented one occurred this year.

The reason for that was, as expected, the result coming from the reform of various agricultural techniques.

The sowing technique was genuinely carried out.

Fields were thoroughly watered.

A natural drug based on wood vinegar was created.

An open ditch and a subterranean drain were installed.

The completion of the weed mower.

And then, the possibility of overturning the top and bottom of the soil thanks to the introduction of the plow, and so on.

The primitive and carefree farming method of unclear sowing of seeds and leaving them as they are has disappeared.

A thorough method which would cherish vast lands was needed.

There were lots of problems since the method required lots of effort in the beginning in order to yield a result.

Til then, farmers would have little reward, but in turn, they would spend less time on its execution.

The farmers here had a bit of a different image from those patient and tolerant ones.

There was also a voice inside Eiji complaining about this work interfering with his private life with Tanya.

Nevertheless, the horizontally lying wheat that radiated with immense golden color fascinated everyone.

The harvest amount swelled up to four times its normal amount.

From a single wheat seed, one could grow as many as 10 stalks of wheat

People tend to be tolerant whenever a result yields profits?.

There were even voices of people questioning whether or not Eiji was one of the messengers sent by the Goddess of Abundant Crops from an unknown time.

Despite them accepting the results now, they had only allowed Eiji to test and introduce his new methods into a new arable land.

Everyone was probably thinking it would be nice if the 4-crop system were applied onto their fields as well.

Since Giorgio and Bernardo were close to Eiji, they would be among a small handful of people who could experience this good situation.

And then, starting from the next year, the system will most likely be adopted by the whole village.

The tax imposed by Nazioni on planted areas with wheat was decided upon a rough assumption of their total crop yield.

Franko coming would be the last step of the tax collection process based on topography-related issues.

As the tax collection would take place after the period of harvesting, it was the best for Siena to store their crops in a hidden warehouse like this.

– Well then, I'm going back.

– See you again. Eiji-san, be careful on your way, and give my regards to Tanya-chan.

– She's going to give birth soon, right? Take care of her.

– Yes, I'll be heading back quickly.

The two farmers went to the north from inside the forest of the Goddess, whereas, Eiji went oppositely to the south, which was the direction of his home.

Once he passes through the forest going south, he will probably reach a small path leading to the mining place.

Provided Eiji heads back from that point, he could return back without being suspected by anyone.

*

By the time Eiji returned home, it was already evening.

That day, he was standing in the kitchen, preparing a meal instead of the pregnant Tanya, whom he had kept quiet many times.

Sitting in a chair while holding her belly, Tanya gazed at Eiji, with a gentle smile on her face.

Eiji made an account of his activities today to Tanya.

- I'm surprised there was something like that.
- Those stored harvests can become our provisions during a crop failure, so they are quite reassuring.
- We probably don't have worry about that part, but just so that the children don't enter that place, I think it's better to remind them a bit.
- Yeah, it's important as well, I guess. I shall tell them indirectly to pay more attention.
- That's because you might be, reversely, suspected instead, were you to tell them too directly, right?

Recently, Eiji had been discussing, little by little, more with Tanya.

Indeed, her pieces of advice were quite accurate.

It seemed that the suggestion of consulting Tanya given by Bona wasn't just for show.

- I'm glad I've discussed that matter with you.
- Please count on me any time. Since my tummy has grown larger, right now, I can't do much besides just listening to a conversation like this.
- This is much enough.

Tanya, who had a thorough knowledge regarding the villagers in Siena, could respond to Eiji's concerns by utilizing her broad knowledge.

Sometimes, there were instances where Eiji would ask for information about others through his wife, instead of the person of interest.

The presence of Tanya, who could back up Eiji's opinion in places where he himself wouldn't be able to notice, was reassuring for him.

– Something smells nice, doesn't it? What are you cooking for today?

– Today, I'm making a Paella.

– Pa-ell-a?

– Yes. I told you before I wanted to make this dish. At first, I wanted to taste some Onigiri, but because it's not suited for adjusting the water quantity inside the earthenware pot that I made, I've given up. Rice rice rice—

While he was humming, Eiji regulated the fire.

However, he was a little shy of the amount of seafood needed to make his dish.

What Eiji was able to prepare was shrimp and dried cod.

He also prepared onions, carrots, and saffron.

The lack of seasoning would become a problem, nevertheless, the dish would receive a passing mark in terms of ingredients.

From the simmering pot, the smell of white wine filled the interior of the room.

– So this is a dish you've eaten before, right?

– Yes, and finally, it's here. Once I'm finished with this one, I'll make Onigiri and Fried rice next. There are so many dishes I want to try; it makes me feel troubled.

- Fufufu, aw—
- W-What's the matter?
- Just now, the baby kicked.
- I wonder if it wants to have some of the meal.
- Looks like it will grow into a glutton, won't it?

Leaving the place of cooking, Eiji drew close to Tanya's side.

As he placed his hand on her swollen belly, he could feel the presence of the baby inside.

- Will it be a boy, or perhaps a girl? Which one do you think will it be, Tanya-san?
- I'm fine either way. It will be enough for me as long it's born healthy.
- Me too.

Once the baby is born, Eiji will have to deal with its night cry while focusing on the development of the village.

And also, he himself had to strive as the blacksmith.

Because of that, it was necessary for him to progress with the preparations for her childbirth.

Eiji imagined the future.

Would it be a boy, or a girl?

If it was a boy, he wanted for the child to succeed his household.

Whereas, if it was girl, it would probably become a beauty similar to Tanya.

Indeed, I want to protect this happiness. – Is what he thought.

He wished for that from deep inside his heart.

And then, several days later.

Eiji was, right now, nervously clutching his hand in sweat.

Next to him, Franko, the tax collector from Nazioni, was standing.

Good grief, just why on earth do I have to guide this guy?

Eiji complained inside himself.

First thing in the morning, Eiji was ordered by Franko, who had arrived, to guide him around the village, as there was nobody else apart from him.

According to what Franko said, he wanted Eiji to explain to him the details of the newly built facilities besides from just knowing they were related to the development of the village.

However, the one who actually built them was Fernando, and there were villagers who used them as well.

There was no reason for him to be in charge of the facilities.

Eiji explained that to Franko, but nevertheless, he would still demand Eiji to guide him.

Or perhaps, there was another motive behind Franko's request.

– Here we have the newly reclaimed farmland.

– I see. So there's no way for it to just grow the wheat.

– Yes, a quarter of the whole field is used only once for planting wheat. On the remaining ones, we plant white clovers, barley, and turnips.

– Is there a meaning in doing so? If not, you should plant more wheat instead, still...

– I do think there is. Franko-san too, do you know that continuously growing wheat in the same place will result in a crop failure?

– Yes. That's why we need to put fields into a yearly rest.

Until now, the wheat would be planted using 2 fields, known as the

2-crop system.

It was convenient for managing one's personal field.

That's because cultivating one's own farmland into 2 halves was good enough.

However, the 3-crop system and the 4-crop system requires management to work.

The reason why Eiji's newly introduced method was difficult to adopt was also greatly due to the aspect of group work.

– By introducing this method, it's possible for us to gain crops from other products without reducing their high number. If we do so, we can increase the amount of livestock as well.

– Is it really do-able?

Franko muttered.

That's right, it hasn't been decided yet.

In the end, it was something they could both discuss once it had yielded a result.

As Eiji didn't reply to that, Franko nodded down after a while of remaining silent.

– Well, it's not like the tax imposed on the planted area with the wheat is going to change. Of course, you will provide me with correct information regarding your newly reclaimed land, right?

– There should be no mistakes in that.

– Well, judging from what I've seen, there doesn't seem to be any problem. What's more, it doesn't appear the other fields are different from their usual.

– It's because results have yet to be produced.

Eiji had the duty of reporting about his planted wheat and about his newly reclaimed land to the ruler of Nazioni.

Apart from observation, Franko's duty also included confirmation of Eiji's report.

That's because there were many people who would under evaluate their production.

Nazoni's counterplan against villagers' attempts of tax evasion wouldn't just stop with that.

It was common for the villagers to put wheat of possibly the lowest quality among their load, or sometimes, even mixing barley with the wheat.

Rather than just saying tax evasion, it was proof of many people trying to oppose the reign of Nazoni.

– Well then, the last thing to check would be your workplace.

– There's nothing much in particular. Just the same thing as usual.

– I see, is that so?

– After all, it's only a single workshop, you see. There have been various things I've made, but besides them, the workshop is just a plain facility.

– Well, what kind of things have you been making this year? I'm looking forward to seeing them. Also, it's my job to check on them since they're also related to tax collection.

– After you....

Eiji and Franko moved toward the blacksmith's workplace.

Because Dante and Katharina were disciples who came from Nazoni, they gathered around Franko in a dear manner.

One couldn't see any unpleasant feeling on their faces toward other villagers.

Even if the villagers were anxious about them, it didn't mean they would hate them. Was it perhaps due the villagers thinking it would contribute to a good government for their land?

Leaving their reunion talk for later, it looked like Franko wanted to prioritize his inspection of the workshop.

As he deemed their reunion would interfere with his work, he sent Dante and the rest back to their post.

Taking a deep breath.

Eiji was worried if there was anything disagreeable inside the workshop.

Such thought floated in his mind.

— Spear heads.

Since they were clearly weapons, it would run contrary with his previously stated words about him not making weapons.

Were it to be found by any chance, it would possibly be collected in the form of a tax. What's more, Siena would lose their predominance of being the only one to possess iron-made weapons.

.....That's bad.

Franko still hasn't entered in and the spear heads were put in a box for delivering goods.

No, to begin with, Eiji probably didn't consider that option as he thought he could immediately fix that problem after being informed about Franko's arrival.

Were he not ordered to help with Franko's sudden inspection, Eiji would probably think of a quick countermeasure.

Was this possibly Franko's aim?

Eiji stole a glance at him.

His expression seemed to have some sort of confidence.

There was a high possibility for the spear heads to be found out, were they to enter like that at the same time.

Not to mention, if Eiji starts to do some half-baked tidying up, he will

draw Franko's attention instead.

What should I do?

Eiji was troubled for a very short moment.

And then, he decided.

– Well then, Franko-san. I know it's abrupt, but won't you please not come inside?

– What? Unless I enter in, I won't be able to do my inspection, right?

– Stop your steps immediately. If you make an unreasonable trespass, I too shall remove you forcefully.

– Don't be stupid. Are you serious with saying that?

When there's no time, one should create it, even if it means using forcible methods.

In Franko's sudden words, a clear display of his anger was felt.

There was no way for Eiji to step back at this point.

Chapter 81 – Franko's Inspection (middle part)

The gaze coming from Franko, was awfully stern.

Nevertheless, Eiji wouldn't step back.

As if I could lose to this sort of man! – He thought.

Were Eiji to be outlasted by Franko, his position would reversely turn for the worse.

Why are you trying to stop me? – The situation would change into such.

And then, as a result of being doubted, the spear heads would be discovered and Eiji's happiness for tomorrow would most likely disappear.

If that happens, perhaps they could've just lived peacefully without considering any rebellion.

Imagining their lost future, Eiji felt the urge to shiver with his body.

However, he looked straight at Franko while suppressing his movements.

Eiji suffered a bitter experience during his last year's negotiation.

Being utterly cornered by Franko, he was close to feeling that he wasn't up to negotiations.

No, Eiji most likely understood that Franko was hard to deal with....

—— A bitter experience, it was.

But, within this single year, Eiji gained lots experience.

That's right, after all, a year had passed.

He took the initiative and carried out a business negotiation during his trip for trading.

Eiji was able to lead Jean by the nose toward the development he desired at the time of their negotiation.

And he had also become resolute in protecting his growing family.

I can't lose.

It was Eiji's turn to win this year.

The moment for vindicating his honor arrived.

What's more, this was a blacksmith's workshop, his arena.

No matter what kind of negotiation it was, there was no way for him to lose as long he would do what he was best at.

Eiji fixed his eyes on Franko.

– ——I'm serious.

– Do you understand the meaning of your words? Refusing my request for inspection would be similar to expressing your intention of mutiny against us.

– Franko-san, I'd be troubled to have you misunderstand my intention that way.

– What....? If there's a reason behind your conduct, please explain.

Franko wasn't the sort of man who would simply get angry.

Even now, he would quickly work his head by trying to understand Eiji's implication.

That was an obvious thing.

A shabby man, who was short-tempered, could be, by no means, a shrewd government official.

Eiji believed that Franko was a capable person.

This man wouldn't pass down rash decisions.

Because of that, Franko couldn't help but follow Eiji's words.

That part of him would also become a winning chance for Eiji.

– I'm one of those obedient people who will fulfil their duties. It's not like you're completely forbidden from entering or anything, but I just want you to go through the proper procedure. First, please cleanse your body. Since there's a river behind the workshop, please clean your feet and rinse your mouth. Once you're done, you can go in. That's the custom of this place.

– What's that? Is there some sort of meaning in doing so?

– It's purification. Anyway, if you want to enter, please follow that rule. Apart from my disciples, so far, nobody has entered into this place.

A silent atmosphere continued for a while, but Eiji wouldn't change his mind.

What's more, it was merely a request for abiding one's rules rather than anything unreasonable.

There was no way for him to prohibit Franko from coming in.

Eiji had no reason to withdraw.

Their sights, which entwined with each other's, were intense to the extent of giving off sparks.

Eiji wouldn't avert his eyes as this was a do-or-die situation.

It can't be helped – Franko probably yielded due to Eiji's resolution which he felt.

– It shouldn't matter how I wash myself, right?

– Since it must have been a long journey for you, please clean yourself thoroughly and make your toes look neat.

– Just what kind of meaning does it bear?

– That's in order not to profane this sacred place, which is a blacksmith's workshop.

Once he confirmed Franko moving to the back of the building, he checked, without rush but quickly, the inside of it.

There was no time.

With Franko washing his feet and rinsing his mouth—— how much time could he earn?

Eiji checked the place in which he stored the spear heads.

They were casually lined up in a clearly exposed way.

That was dangerous.

These items would probably be discovered, were they left just like this.

Well then, where should I hide them?

Damn, it's cold – While Eiji was contemplating on that, a voice filled with abusive language was heard from the direction of a louver door.

– Oi, lend me a towel so that I can wipe my feet!

– Right away, I wonder, where did I put?

– Do it fast! My feet are freezing, so I don't care!

Hearing the voice, Eiji first searched for a towel while being a bit rushed.

And at the same time, he grabbed the spear heads from the box for delivering goods.

Eiji ran his eyes around the room.

Where, where was it completely safe to hide the items?

A guarantee was needed.

– Please wait a bit. I'll be there soon.

After he uttered some words, Eiji hid the items in a specific place quickly and carefully. Luckily, no sound of him doing so was heard.

Let's go. – He thought.

Were Eiji to make Franko wait too long, the latter would start to hold a suspicion.

—————

The river water was chilly.

That chill will probably correspond to fall once it deepens.

Franko wiped his feet carefully.

Since he would usually ride his horse, there was no considerable cloud of dust or mud on him.

Franko, who adjusted his appearance, looked at him in a gazing manner, which made Eiji tremble a little.

-.....Is it okay now?

– Yes, that's enough. Let me guide you in.

– This is what everyone is supposed to do, right?

– Even if they were guests, I wouldn't make them stand by the gate, you see. In the case of my disciples, it's been decided that they have to welcome the New Year when they enter the workplace for the first time during that year.

– New Year....that would be in the middle of winter. So you make them wash their feet despite their surroundings being covered in snow?

– Yes, that's because there's a god residing in this workshop, you see.

– I can't believe it....

As if unable to comprehend, Franko shook his head from side to side.

In a world of polytheism, the god of a blacksmith's workshop would be a common thing.

The presence of the god would most likely be felt when handling a

quivering metal in high heat.

Or when noticing the sharpness of a tool changing with a slight difference in temperature and considering that mystery as a manifestation of the god.

- Fumu, indeed, the workplace is overflowing with things.
- It's because I receive orders from many different places.

Right after coming in, Franko ran his sight through various places. His gaze didn't seem to rest on just rare items.

Eiji understood he was diligently carrying out his inspection while trying to grasp the nature of the so-called blacksmith's workshop. For a while, Eiji decided to have him sit in front of the furnace and face the fire.

- What are these things here?
- They are tools intended to supply Tal Village and are called a hoe and a spatula.
- Fumu, is there a need to craft that hoe with iron? As far as I'm concerned, they should be carrying bronze-made tools, still...
- Both tools have different strength. What's more, I can make this hoe put less of a burden on its user just by hardening it with no need of reshaping.
- I see.

Having Franko's consent, Eiji drew out a single box.

Arrowheads and a Nata sheathed in a scabbard were stored inside. The Nata, which stuck out, was leaning against the side of the box. Taking it out, he passed the tool to Franko.

- This is one of the Natas, which I promised to supply you with together with the arrowheads. Go ahead and try it out.
- Fumu, so this is a Nata....? It's quite heavy and balanced. I wonder how strong it is.
- To the extent of lightly cutting up lumber and copper.
-Seriously?
- And even a thin iron plate. With this single thing, you can even take a beast as your opponent, lop off bushes, and make firewood. Well, it's perfect for use in the mountains.
- I've heard from other people about how superior it is, but after

learning about its actual purpose from you, it's indeed tremendous....

Franko scrutinized and observed the Nata.

Was Eiji able to convince him? As soon as Franko sheathed the tool back into the scabbard, Eiji stored it into the box and placed it on the shelves.

– Can't I bring these back with me right now?

– I still have to grind their blades, so please wait til when you come for tax collection.

– Is that so? I thought the citizens in Nazioni would be pleased with these, but I guess it can't be helped.

– That's because people's evaluation of these products will decrease if I hand them half-baked items. And then, these are the newly developed tools, which I promised you last year.

Eiji introduced the things, which he had made during this whole year. Starting from carpentry tools, he showed Franko a plane, a set of chisels, screws, a vise, and a sledgehammer.

Even if he presented the tools one by one, depending on their usage, they could be divided into several dozens of varieties, making that number enormous.

Obviously, explaining how each of them works in detail wasn't possible.

As doing so required people engaging in a practical work; without which one would be unable to understand the secret in a tool's shape and its weight.

– That's a terrifying number indeed.

– Each of these tools has their own reason behind their shape. For the sake of making them convenient in use, it's important to subdivide them.

As Eiji made a simple explanation, Franko nodded from time to time while listening attentively to him.

Passing their time like that, the explanation was close to reaching its end.

Good grief, so it came to this? – While he was thinking so, he noticed a stern gaze directed at him by Franko.

- There's something I need to ask you.
-What could it be?

Unlike before, Franko's attitude changed all of sudden.

Sensing a clear vigor coming from him, Eiji braced himself.

Just what kind of a bombshell statement will jump out?

Still, no matter what he was told, Eiji would, by no mean, lose his composure.

He was completely prepared.

- It appears you're making spear heads, right?

Eiji's heart turned rampant.

Chapter 82 – Franko's Inspection (last part)

– It appears you're making spear heads, right?

At Franko's words, Eiji's heart beat faster.

It was a shock which sent chills down his spine.

Just when on earth did you learn about that? – Is what Eiji thought.

The reason for that was because Franko has been with Eiji all the time since he called Eiji in the early morning.

Eiji had already witnessed Franko's manner of working as a tax collector; nevertheless, he shouldn't have been able to gain enough time for gathering information.

And then, that he arrived in the early morning should itself deny him that possibility.

Dante and the rest came to the workshop as usual.

Even if they were able to keep their mouths shut, Eiji should still have been able to notice small changes in their attitude.

Thus, it could be stated that such a thing hadn't happened as far as what Eiji remembered.

Despite Eiji training his disciples for somewhere around half a year to a full year now, they would still see each other almost throughout the day.

Were he to pile up their time spent together, it would probably exceed that of Eiji and his wife, Tanya.

Obviously, their position as master and disciples was different, however, as one would expect, Eiji would immediately become aware of anything that feels off.

First, he had to confirm when Franko had acquired that information.

– You're saying some strange things there, ain't you? Just from where on earth did you learn of such gossip?

– Now, where did I hear about it? I'm sure it was inside this village.

As expected, Franko wouldn't disclose his source of information that easily.

On top of that, him applying pressure on the villagers here would be the same as acquiring certain data.

Well, it was agonizing indeed.

In the end, “which” spear did his information pertain to?

Just like this, it was hard for Eiji to make a decision.

Assuming Franko considered that matter suspicious, it would be necessary for this side to retort.

In that case, it should be fine for Eiji to say that the items just happened to be made in the past.

However, if their talk regards his recent making of spear heads, then there will be nothing more that Eiji can do.

– When did you hear about that? Even though I’ve been constantly by your side, I haven’t heard about such a rumor, which seems to be so limited in information, so...

– Well, since it was during my previous visit here, how long has it been? Was it during the time I brought Dante and the rest with me? I wonder...

– I see.

Eiji’s biggest doubt had cleared up.

And then, he understood, that there was most likely no need for any worry.

Eiji sensed as if the stiffness came loose from his body, making it feel lighter for him.

Indeed, there was a time when he made spears before; nevertheless, those ones no longer existed as he converted them into farming implements.

Not to mention, what Eiji feared the most was when he had sensed someone’s presence the other day.

Wasn’t I being peeked at that time? – Such a fear wouldn’t leave his mind. However, knowing it wasn’t at least related to this matter, he felt quite at ease.

Whatever Eiji would do after this, he could find a way to compromise Franko without being investigated by the latter.

– Well, I wonder myself about that, but I made spears once before.

– Oh, is that so? Which means you have changed your mind in order to make weapons, right?

- However, I do not possess them any longer.
- What do you mean?
- Crafting spears was just an emergency measure against wolves that tried to attack this village. After that, I quickly beat and reshaped them into present farming tools. All the members in this village should know about this story, but haven't you asked them?

Hmm – Franko kept silent.

Were Eiji to make any flashy explanation, he would reversely bring an unfavorable situation on himself.

That's why, he wanted to answer in all honesty.

- Certainly, I've heard a story like that.
- It seems that Franko-san thought about me changing my mind regarding making weapons, but well, that's the background of the story, and there are no more spears from that time. I'm consistent with my beliefs, and therefore, I won't change my standpoint of not wanting to produce weapons.
- Is that so?Still, you won't mind if I check it just in case, right?
- For what purpose? Your role is to collect things paid in the form of taxes. What's more, looking everywhere in a sacred place just because of an unheard rumor is, honestly speaking, unpleasant for me.
- Nevertheless, there still might be a chance.

Despite saying this much, he still won't withdraw? What a troublesome man. Guess, I'll have to make one more move in this risky gamble. – Is what Eiji thought.

- If you say you want to check this place at any cost, then fine. But let me ask something before you do so. Assuming I provided you with false report and you find out spears, what kind of punishment will you give?
- Fumu.... For example, I think it should be obvious, but all the weapons will be confiscated. Not to mention, I'll impose additional taxes, and you won't be able to avoid forced labor.
- I see.

Nodding down, Eiji used that moment to create an advantage. And then, once he gazed sharply at Franko, he stated his condition.

- Then, in case you don't find any, please bear the responsibility and make up for your error in equal amount. Like by exempting us from taxes and forced labor, you see.
- Don't be silly. I told you, I'm carrying out my official duty.
- How can you call it your duty when you're wielding your power of the state like that without any proof? I'm willing to go along with you as much as is possible, but, treading on our good faith, I'd like you to take your own risks as well.

The atmosphere was filled with silence.

Even if Franko bears the risk, as long as he's confident about Eiji making spears, it will be Eiji's loss.

He would probably find them, were to be persistent.

As if brooding for a while, Franko kept silent.

Well, what's your answer?

-.....I got it, I got it. I shall believe you.

- If you want to carry out such an inspection next time, please provide me with clear evidence and testimony. I too won't be able to retreat if someone gives an evidence.

Franko shrugged his shoulders in a giving up manner.

Eiji was glad to place an emphasis on the rules and on the fact that the blacksmith's workshop is a sacred place from the very beginning. Tidying up the box in which he stored the arrowheads for Nazioni, Eiji lowered the fire inside the fireplace.

It looked like Franko had stopped shivering and his body began to warm up.

- Good job guiding me today. Actually, your splendid manner of working is something worthy of being appreciated.
- Thank you very much. Despite you saying so, I only proposed few ideas. The ones who carried out them were the villagers here, so please give them your acknowledgement.
- However, their results are also the results of the one who managed them. I actually hold you in high regards. Like this, I want you to contribute not just for the sake of this village but also for the development of Nazioni.
- If it's within my range as an individual, then I'll gladly help.

Franko's eyes were cold by itself.

His cold sight, which was characteristic of that of an observer, stared fixedly at Eiji.

If he's told to lend his wisdom to all the people on this island, then Eiji won't be hesitant in making that choice.

If he's told that his agricultural knowledge will save them from famine, he will gladly take the lead.

And if he's told that tools are necessary, Eiji will most likely be pleased to sell them.

However, there will be no end if it's for a ruler to prosper one-sidedly.

Eiji had a hard time in trying to not let his objection show through his eyes.

– Today, you did a good job. Once more let's have a meal together afterwards.

– Understood. Franko-san, what do you plan to do from now on?

– Hm. I'm going to greet some familiar faces from Nazioni. It appears they've been doing their best for somewhere between half a year to a full year now.

– Yes. As their master, I can say they've been doing pretty well. It's also thanks to you, Franko-san.

Well then, just what kind of information are they going to exchange with each other?

Eiji became mindful, however, there was no way for him to tail Franko.

As soon as Franko left the workshop, Eiji saw him off.

Turning his back on Eiji and continuing to depart, Franko said to himself.

– Still, I was surprised at you for showing me such a strange and strong resistance this time. Suddenly, it makes me want to question if there's something I should feel guilty about in my job.

Without hearing an answer, Franko walked away like that.

-.....*exhale*. So I somehow managed to pull it off.....?

With Franko's figure disappearing, Eiji breathed out a sigh of relief. His body felt heavy.

Being mentally exhausted, he felt he wouldn't be able to move.

Eiji walked back as if dragging his legs sluggishly toward the front of the shelves used for goods delivery.

And then, taking out the box containing things for paying taxes, he pulled out the Nata.

– It somehow went smoothly, I guess.

Once he removed a leather scabbard, spear heads appeared.

He hid them inside the scabbard used for sheathing the Nata.

Since the Nata had a somewhat unusually large blade, it was also possible to store an adequate number of spear heads.

Despite that, there was no doubt that it was a disadvantageous bet. Were Franko to check the scabbard directly, he would have probably discovered them.

By picking up the box by himself and handing over the Nata confidently, Eiji could avoid Franko detecting the spear heads.

– However, to carry out this inspection without warning, he's indeed quite cautious of me.

Thinking about how Franko was dealing with him today, Eiji muttered. Even their first encounter turned into a negotiation right after he had returned from trading.

This time, having his chance of taking any countermeasure sealed off, Eiji was taken around since the early morning.

One could probably say that Franko regarded Eiji's existence as highly valuable.

Or perhaps, was he trying to check the reaction coming from this village?

Whichever it is, we too have to be more vigilant of Franko and deal with him better, I guess – Eiji thought.

By the time Eiji reached Bona's house, there was already a meal prepared, with the smell of a stew floating inside the room

The tribal chief, Bona, Eiji, Fernando, Franko, and Jane, who was in charge of the cooking, sat at the table.

- W-What is this cooking?
- What do you mean by what?
- Even if you say this is a type of stew, it has a taste I've never experienced before. The stew has no bitterness and it has a clear substance. I've travelled around all the places inside this territory, but this is the first time for me to have a dish like this. Who was the one to make it?
- That would be Jane-san, you see.
- Indeed, she's one skilful girl in regards to cooking.....

While being surprised, Franko continued to eat in a greedy manner. The basic pre-preparation cooking method of removing the astringent taste and the extraction of Dashi^[1] has probably been refined little by little for a long time.

This sort of pre-preparation was a bit time consuming, but nevertheless, its taste proved to be exceptionally good.

Recently, a similar taste has been considered to be improve among most households in the village.

- Indeed, it makes me want to visit this village first from now on.
- We will introduce this cooking method to you in an easy to understand way. The cooking itself shouldn't be much different from those in other villages.

It was something one couldn't joke about.

Were Franko to come more often because of delicious cooking, it would become a great nuisance.

They also wanted him to consider the feelings of the side which organized those friendly receptions.

Perhaps, there was no need to hide one's cooking method in particular.

As long as it's for warding off Franko, it will be enough profit.

Once the meal reached a point where they could rest, Franko expressed his words of consideration toward the development that took place within the region.

- Judging from the character of this place, even in this developing

territory, Siena has the tendency to fall behind. However, I've been nothing but surprised by the way it has been developing recently. Indeed, most of the advancements in this development can be accredited to Eiji's great efforts.

- A single person like me is only capable of smithing.
- There's no need for you to be humble, you know?
- No, I'm being honest. No matter how much knowledge you possess, it will be meaningless as long you can't carry it out in practice. I think it's thanks to Fernando-san shaping my plan of development and the tribal chief accurately conducting everyone in the village that we have what we have now.
- Still, your knowledge and wisdom was the core of this development. Being too humble will make you sound sarcastic.

Even though he was praised by Franko, why wasn't he that glad? As soon as Eiji shrugged his shoulders and ignored, he noticed Franko gazing fixedly at him. Somehow, his sight gave a bad feeling.

-.....Is something matter?

- Well, Eiji. There's something I need to convey to you.
- What could it be?
- I was given an order by the ruler, Nazioni-sama, to summon you. He told me to bring you with me this time when I'll be collecting tax offerings.
- What? Right now, I'd rather not leave the village since my wife is pregnant, so....
- You won't be sojourning for a long time. What's more, we have a reason for calling you as there's not enough explanation for us regarding how your invented items should be used in practice. Because of that, even if we go through the trouble of collecting taxes in the form of your new products, we are still unable to apply them skillfully, which is unfair for us. As a tax collector, it's my duty to take care of this, you see.
- Can't you just forward me some people in charge of using those items?
- There would be no problem, were we to carry out normal business. However, that excuse won't work as I was told to present you together with the tax offerings.

Franko's explanation had pretty much made sense.

Still, was it the city of Nazioni?

If possible, Eiji didn't want to go at such a time as this.

But since it was before the village would launch their plan of mutiny, it was probably a favorable opportunity.

Even at present, Eiji had no knowledge regarding the current state of the city called Nazioni.

Nevertheless, what troubled him was that he didn't know how long they would keep him constrained.

As if sensing Eiji's worry, Bona threw him a lifeboat.

– Fumu, I've a question, but is it fine?

– Please go ahead, Bona-san.

– Can you promise that Eiji won't sojourn for long? Just like he said before, my granddaughter, Tanya, is giving birth soon. If possible, I'd like for her to tag along with him.

– I swear on my name that Eiji won't stay there for more than 2 days.

At Franko's promise, Eiji sighed with relief for the time being.

He couldn't tell how much of his promise was true, but declaring like this to another tribal chief would probably mean that the promise would be kept.

– How about you, Eiji? I don't think even Franko will revoke his promise with me, but....

– From here to Nazioni, how far it is?

– A one-way trip will take 2-3 days. Since we have excessive luggage with us on our way there, probably 3 days, I guess.

– With that, it would take us around a week, right?

If that was the case, there would still be time left til his wife's birth.

And if Eiji had Fernando progress with his house reconstruction during his absence, there should most likely be no hindrance to the birth itself.

– We still have some extra time, but I think it's better for us to depart as quickly as possible, otherwise snow will start falling. In addition to you fulfilling your job of delivering the taxes, I'd recommend bringing Dante, Katharina, and the rest. They too have been constantly

working this year, so it will probably do them good if they return and meet their families.

– Understood. If they're going to return here either way, it's probably better for them to go with you.^[2]

What kind of ruler awaited Eiji at Nazioni?

In the end, was it someone whom one shouldn't consider uprising against?

Let's check it out. – Is what he thought.

Notes

1. Japanese cooking stock popularly eaten with Miso soup (fermented soybeans) and Rice.
2. Not 100% sure about this sentence

Chapter 83 – The Sudden Visit and the Suspicion of Bigamy

Eiji's departure was decided to take place at noon of the next day. Once he returned back from Bona's residence, Eiji told the whole story involving him and Franko to Tanya.

She listened to the story while remaining silent, but, one couldn't guess what kind of emotions were written on her face.

Eiji felt unpleasant since he had been constantly on the move, however, Tanya nodded and sighed with relief.

– It can't be helped, right? What's more, it doesn't seem like we can refuse.

– Guess so. On top of that, it's not an unreasonable request, and there's a time limit for it. I'm sorry for causing you additional troubles, Tanya-san, but, please don't work too hard, okay?

– I'll be fine. Eiji-san too, you should be a bit more careful when dealing in critical situations, okay? You never know what can happen as a result of various things, so....

– Uhh... I'll reflect on that.

Back then, it was, indeed, a dangerous situation.

Eiji managed to cut through the plight that involved him and Franko, but there was no guarantee it would go well another time.

Perhaps, it was necessary for them to be prepared on a regular basis.

As soon as Eiji groaned, a sound of knocking was heard from the door's direction.

It was already near evening.

Usually, they wouldn't receive any guest at such time.

Because of that, both Eiji and Tanya had a hard time determining who it was.

– I wonder who it is.

– Well, but could it some important matter?

Trying to raise her body, Tanya was held back by Eiji with his hand. He stood up and moved to the door, but confirmed who it was before opening.

- Yes, who is there?
- It's me, Eiji-san.

Eiji recognized the person by their voice. It was Katharina. However, unlike her usual self, she didn't give off her gentle mood. If one was to describe it, her tone of voice felt tense and it didn't sound like her. Just what has happened? – While thinking about it suspiciously, Eiji opened the door.

- I apologize for interrupting you at this late a time.
- Katharina-san, is something the matter?
- Actually, there's something I wanted to convey Eiji-san and Tanya-san no matter what.
- I wonder what could it be?

For now, please come inside – He urged Katharina to step in. Soon after she entered in with a stern expression, Eiji closed the door and firmly placed a latch on it. Assuming it was a serious matter, it would be troublesome to have anyone eavesdrop on it. Offering Katharina a chair, the three of them sat in a circle around the table. Well then, just what kind of business does she have? There was most likely no doubt about Franko being involved, since Katharina suddenly popped up at this time.

- Tomorrow, Eiji-san is heading toward Nazioni, right?
- Yes. Not just me, but also Katharina-san, Dante, and the others, should be along with me as well.
- I declined that offer. I believe it's better for me to stay here.
- Why is that? Don't you have your family over there?
- There's my father, but... I don't think there should be any problems.
- Why? Wouldn't he be pleased to see you after a whole year?
- I think he would be more glad to learn about me not returning.

Katharina's expression became tenser and tenser.

Shortly thereafter, tears began to build up in a ㇿ's shape on the corners of her eyelids.

Just like a busted dam, the tears fell down one after another as Katharina sobbed convulsively without any sound.

Eiji and Tanya looked at each other.

Certainly, it wasn't a simple case. Just what had happened?

Even if it was done quickly, they wanted to ask on that matter, but Katharina seemed to be unable to hold a conversation.

– Let's wait til she calms down, Eiji-san.

– That seems to be a good option.

Bringing some hot water to Katharina, who was shuddering, they both waited for her to drink and settle down.

During that time, Tanya was gently stroking Katharina's back.

A while had passed.

Did she finally begin to calm down? Katharina slowly lifted up her head.

– I'm sorry, I've settled down.

– That's most important. Then, what has happened? Somehow, it looks like you have had an unpleasant experience.

– Please wait a bit.

Trying to calm down completely in front of them, Katharina took many deep breaths.

After that, once she raised up her face, she began to speak with a desperate expression.

– The reason why Eiji-san was called this time by Nazioni isn't because he wants you to provide his people with explanations on your new tools. It's to make Eiji-san a member of his clan out of convenience.

– What do you mean by clan? Tanya-san, can you understand?

– Considering it under normal circumstances, it probably means marrying someone from the other household. However, if I'm not wrong, all of Nazioni's children should be males.

– Yes, it's just as Tanya-san says. That's why, Nazioni is trying to adopt a new daughter-in-law.....And that, would be me.

– Katharina-san?

At Eiji's question, Katharina nodded.
And then, she took a deep sigh.

– I was told by Franko-san that for the sake of peace on this island, for your sake, and then, for the sake of Eiji-san's future as well, it's better for me to become Nazioni's adopted child.
– Ummm, can you please wait for a moment?

Intercepting their talk, Eiji contemplated for a while.
In order to enter into the clan, Nazioni would have to hold an engagement for Eiji.
In other words, does it mean he and Katharina-san will have to marry each other?

– P, Please wait a moment. As you can see, I'm already, married, and Tanya-san is my wife. Isn't that plan unreasonable?
– No, bigamy isn't particularly banned. Even Nazioni has two wives presently.
– Speaking of which, the tribal chief of Mostori also had three wives, right...?

Still, he wondered how he should consider that matter.
Katharina was another beauty besides Tanya.
With her cheerful attitude, there was no doubt their cohabitation would be enjoyable.
Despite that, it's not like Eiji himself wished for the marriage, as he thought his life with Tanya was enough already.

– Eiji-san.....Will you accept me?
– H, Hm.....

As if being troubled, Katharina looked at him with her upturned eyes. Somehow, her timid expression made him want to protect her.
With Katharina's eyes becoming teary, Eiji had the feeling he would break her heart, were he to refuse.

However, should I accept two wives?
What kind of response would Tanya-san give?
Just recalling his previous dispute with Tanya was scary enough for

him to imagine.

To begin with, this talk came as a result of Nazioni's suggestion.

That's why, Eiji couldn't give a prompt reply.

- Eiji-san, you don't have to worry that much.
- T, Tanya-san, what do you mean?
- Look, your face has become stiff. Relax, relax.
- Ahaha...Tanya-san, sorry for that.

Surprisingly, Tanya didn't get angry during... this time's conversation. Far from that, she was kindly worried about Eiji, who was trembling with fear.

Just what was the meaning of that?

Tanya had probably sensed he would consider her attitude as strange.

She looked at Eiji's face while smiling.

- There's no need to apologize. After all, Eiji-san hasn't been fooling around this time, right? You don't hold any responsibility for that, you see. As one would expect, there's no way I could become angry and jealous at somebody like Katharina. Therefore, even if it's decided that Eiji-san is going to marry this time, I won't get mad.

What's more, following that preface, Tanya's eyes shone with an ominous light.

Her expression changed completely, as veins started to appear on her face.

- The one I'm truly angry at isn't Katharina-san but Nazioni and his people who schemed this, you know?
- *Eek!*
- *Eeeek!* E, Eiji-san..... Tanya-san looks scary.

Katharina and Eiji held on each other's shoulders as they both trembled with fear. The appearance of Tanya-san getting angry... was frightening indeed.

Tanya, who appeared to be boiling with rage, whacked the table several times, placed her palms on it, and howled:

- I... have been enduring all this time. I've always believed I should endure and save face, regardless of whatever unreasonable

challenges Eiji-san would be forced into. But....! I can no longer last like this. If, of all things, someone tries to interfere with a woman's happiness, I shall fight him with all my might! So you're saying it's some ruler named Nazioni? I was finally able to obtain the happiness given to a woman after falling behind for more than twenty years, and yet someone is trying to hinder it. I won't forgive them, even if my opponent is to be a goddess!

A person that should, by no means, be enraged, had been infuriated. As Eiji continued to tremble, Katharina too, probably held the same feeling.

Looking at Katharina, Tanya called out to her with a strained-like voice.

Surely, Tanya's face was no different from that of a woman driven mad by jealousy.

– Katharina-san, congratulations. Even if things turn out just like the ruler says, I'll truly, with no restraints, give you my blessing. I think there will be hard times awaiting us, but let's flourish together, okay?

By the time she became a bit sullen, Eiji noticed those weren't her real thoughts. Nevertheless, he couldn't help that being the case.

Chapter 84 – Departure, Now Time for Nazioni

Soon after the conversation ended, Katharina returned back home. A silence continued for a while between Eiji and Tanya. By the time the aftertaste left behind by Katharina's presence began to disappear, Eiji opened his mouth. His sight was directed at the doorway.

- Well, it seems Katharina has returned back, right?
- Yes. I think it's okay now, Eiji-san.

Nodding to each other, they both checked if it was safe to hold a new conversation. It wasn't the sort of talk that was good to be overheard by others.

Eiji asked Tanya a question so as to confirm and reshape the doubt dwelling inside of him.

- So what's your opinion?
- Do you think she was seriously saying that?
- In other words, you mean to say she was told to do so by Franko?
- Yes.

I see. This has become quite a nuisance.

Eiji thought it would be nice, were it to be Katharina's own view. Katharina, who adhered to her own beliefs, would wish for her own happiness even if it was a little. If she could express total lies, no doubt many of her worries would be relieved.

To begin with, Eiji had thought that the possibility for that was low, but nevertheless.... assuming the content of Katharina's talk was genuine, it would mean that yet another vexing truth became apparent.

- I've come to understand something thanks to this time's

conversation.

– What?

– Franko most likely, knows about me making weapons.

–For real? Just how——

– No, you see. I've been keeping his words inside my mind when he parted with me.

{Suddenly, it makes me want to question if there's something I should feel guilty about in my job.}

Is what Franko said.

Those were probably not words uttered by a dejected loser who was unable to achieve his goal.

Recalling that moment, Eiji felt a chill running through his spine.

– There's a chance he mostly believed that way, I think.

– Still, he didn't try to be forceful in pursuing what he wanted, right?

– Perhaps, he thought it would be better not to create any deplorable event, were they to admit me into the clan afterwards, you see. And then, the one who was providing Franko with information would most likely be——

What resurfaced inside Eiji and Tanya's heads was the face of the same person.

They both nodded in agreement at the same time.

– It's Katharina-san, isn't it? Eiji-san, you too would completely agree on that, right?

– Yes. To begin with, even if I am to object, I've no authority over Katharina. What's more, were I to butt in right after hearing some of her story, I probably wouldn't have been able to see it through.

– Eiji-san has become quite skillful in negotiations, haven't you?

– It's thanks to you. Still, I was nervous about whether or not I'd enrage Tanya-san.

– I too thought it felt off.

That's because, the way you spoke was very different from how you usually speak? – Tanya said.

Being told that, Eiji could only make a wry smile.

Judging from Tanya-san's perspective, I wonder what she thinks of

me. – he thought.

Originally, Eiji didn't have much self-confidence in himself.

However, as soon as they both became wife and husband, Eiji believed he should build a fair amount of self-confidence up in himself.

– Still, what's the motive behind their plan this time?

– That's right.... What I can think of is that the plan's role is to suppress any possible mutiny coming from this village, and taking in Eiji-san as a member of their clan is the first step. The first step of making you willing to cooperate. Looking at it in terms of foreign affairs, they probably fear that trading with Siena will become more attractive and preferable to other places than with their city, were we to grow in strength. Their plan is a countermeasure to prevent any Siena-related trade that could lead to mutiny. If we consider the plan's effect in the long term, there's a lot they could gain from that, indeed. I hate to admit it, but I think they've come up with a good idea.

Numerous causes stirred together came out smoothly from Tanya's mouth.

Eiji was in admiration at how she could boldly sort that much information within a brief amount of time.

Even he wouldn't be able to arrive at such an idea.

Perhaps, Eiji would, at most, be able to give one or two examples?

As expected, was Tanya's ability to reason the result of her being groomed as a potential candidate for becoming the tribal chief?

What's more, the number of itemized benefits was surprisingly high.

Still, there was a single problem left.

– For me, the problem lies in Eiji-san being the partner of the engagement, you see.

– Tanya-san, you know, I'm honestly sorry about what I did back there.

– I wonder if that's how you feel. Speaking of which, you didn't seem to be completely against, did you?

Shaking his head desperately from side to side, Eiji denied her statement.

Certainly, he pictured the three of them living together.

Nevertheless, Eiji couldn't think of a future where both Tanya and Katharina would smile.

It was a future in which any of these 2, or rather both them, could only become unhappy, were Eiji to deal with them poorly.

Tanya, who saw his hopeless appearance, began to snicker at him.

For Eiji, it was a shameful experience, to the extent of him emitting steam from his head.

Seriously, don't tease me if you understand. – he thought.

Eiji wanted to change the topic of their conversation, but he wondered if it should be fine to do.

Thinking doubtfully about something, he asked:

– Can you think of any reason as to why Katharina-san became a spy?

– Maybe, it has to do with her not going back or something that's family-related.

– And something more concrete?

– Hm.... For instance, she could've accepted somebody's custody due to her having to take care of someone else because the war left them crippled, and found herself unable to pay a satisfactory amount of taxes because of this.

– Are you saying it's the very reason why Katharina was put into the group that came to this place?

– I'm not sure about that, but the most suspicious thing is...

– Somehow, it appears they are taking advantage of her weakness. It doesn't feel like a pleasant story, does it?

– Although Katharina-san is on the side of wrong-doers for us, she's also in the victimized position, right?

Can nothing be done about that?

Even if Eiji considered himself as being naive, as long it wasn't something that required great troubles, he wanted to save Katharina too.

However, saying so, Eiji also wanted them to pass on the matter of bigamy.

– Still, it's necessary for me to take up their offer, isn't it?

At his question, Tanya kept silent.

For a moment, she made a bitter expression as if being in agony, and had a face that looked like she was forced to swallow something hardly. After that, Tanya nodded down.

– I guess it can't be helped but to accept it.

– Is it about one's honor?

– Yes. When the ruling side proposes a marriage, there's no way for the proposed party to be forgiven were they to refuse. Otherwise, the proposing party will lose face.

– That's right.....In other words, as long he can preserve his honor....

– Eiji-san?

At that moment, Eiji was caught up in his own thoughts.

Not even Katharina's voice would reach him right now.

Eiji felt as if an answer that would bring a turnabout for everything was about to come.

Marriage..... Appeasement..... Clan..... Adopted child.

-.....Tanya-san! How about this?!

– W, What?

At Eiji's sudden scream, Tanya became astonished.

Nonetheless, he had no time to worry about that.

Eiji wanted for her to listen to his opinion straight away.

– You see, that is to say, I will ————.

– Eh? Isn't that a bit unreasonable?

– However, it should also have lots of advantages. And most importantly, Nazioni will be able to save face.

– Indeed, that may be true, but....

– Even if we were to be declined, there's nothing to lose. Don't you think it's worth it to give it a try?

– T, That's right.... Certainly, if he overlooks that fact, the story shouldn't be half as bad. Understood. I'll be waiting for good news from you.

– After all, it's for the sake of protecting our family now, correct? If Tanya-san gives me her support, I'll be inspired with fresh courage.

Putting a grin on his face, Eiji showed off his biceps.

Fret not. It will go well without any doubt. – is what he wanted to convey.

Tanya blinked her eyes in amazement.

It will be fine, don't worry. – He embraced Tanya while saying that to himself.

*

The next day, by the time Eiji arrived at Bona's residence, the preparations were already complete.

A mountain-like amount of wheat was piled up on a rickshaw^[1].

Besides them, there were other sort of things put on stand-like carriers collected in form of taxes, such as fur and wool. Either way, there were lots of items.

Eiji's made tools and different soaps were stored inside one of the carriers.

A part of those carts would be pulled by cattle, but nonetheless, they would be later pulled by people.

In front of Siena's inhabitants, who gathered to pay taxes, there was Franko with his horse.

– So you have arrived?

– Seems like I've made you wait, right? I apologize for that.

– No, I don't mind. To begin with, this departure was unforeseen for you, and you probably had to prepare too.

Just like Franko said, even if it was a sudden one-week absence, one had to do their preparations hurriedly.

There were also other preparations that had to be done, such as preparing water and a food supply, or a change of clothes.

It also appeared that Eiji and the rest would have to sleep outside.

– Howdy, Master. Come and sit next to me.

– On the bullock cart? In the first place, why is Dante-san sitting?

– I'm, well, that's because I'm the son of a ruler, you see. Therefore, I'm receiving special treatment.

– Then, what's the reason for me to sit?

– Rather than assisting with tax collection, I was told by my father to help you. Since I'm just following his orders, it's not like I'll care if you

don't want to comply.

– Hm....

Eiji, who agreed to Dante's talk, boarded the bullock cart.

Judging from the point of view of other villagers, it wasn't a privilege that was praiseworthy or pleasant in feeling, however, even if Eiji was to decline the offer, it could leave a bad impression on Nazioni's court afterwards.

Eiji thought about taking the initiative and about how he should move during their breaks.

With Katharina's appearance nowhere to be seen, she was ostensibly and honestly planning to remain in the village.

Assuming she decided not to return back to her home and see her father after a whole year, it looked like there was quite a reason behind that.

It would be nice if I could at least help a bit in solving her problem during this trip. – Eiji thought.

– Well, we will be leaving shortly, but, do you have anything you left behind?

While saying so, Franko continued to prudently check the carts containing the items paid in taxes.

– Then, we're departing!

At his voice, the troupe began to slowly advance.

Notes

1. The Japanese term "jinrikisha" means "a human powered vehicle", but I'm not sure how it links with the rest.

Chapter 85 – The City of Nazioni

The problem was the path leading to Nazioni, which wasn't quite maintained.

Was it due to it being regularly used for work purposes? The path was, by itself, treaded down. Nevertheless, since there was no pavement at all, it wasn't much different from an animal trail.

Bumps and stones that would hinder one's travel were left as they are.

It wasn't half bad if you were walking, but, it would cause a major problem for those people who would pull carts.

They would need help in overcoming bumps or liberating wheels that have gotten stuck between stones. In the first place, they would have to stop at once and take a detour.

Even though it was okay during fine weather, travelling would most likely be further obstructed once the path became muddy from a big rain.

Since the path was intended for payment of taxes every time, Eiji thought it would be nice were it maintained a little bit. However, considering the current life in his village, Eiji couldn't force an unreasonable request on its people.

To begin with, it was natural to start from maintaining daily life in one's surrounding.

Once its management is stable enough, paving paths will also become a compulsory issue.

*

– When I think about this path stretching continuously, this trip feels indeed tedious.

– No, this level of quality shouldn't be around for more than half a day's worth of the trip from Siena to Nazioni.

Eiji made a genuine complaint without realizing it.

Nevertheless, Dante denied Eiji, who was feeling depressed.

– What do you mean?

– As we go like this, confluencing paths leading to other villages will appear. Every time we get closer to them, our path will become more decent, little by little.

– Oh, since I can only use people from my village, I wonder if we can catch up with others in maintaining paths.

– For now, we are lucky, as the path will get better and better, so you don't have to worry.

Indeed, just like Dante said, the path after the junction running from Tal Village began to have less largish stones.

Eiji could still hardly call it a road, but, the oscillation passing through his bottom turned somewhat gentle.

A human is a being that will get tired from walking.

That applies even more for a person that pulls a cart as he will need to take a break more frequently.

Judging from Eiji's experience, such a person would have to rest for about 10 minutes per each hour.

And then, it looked like Eiji and the rest would have nearly an hour of break after every 3 hours.

Despite saying so, there was no way for one to mark off each break using time measurements as a resting place needed to be set up in both an appropriate area and in a reasonable amount of time.

Such as a place in which one could carve and lay wooden chairs, or a place straying from the path, which was wide and free from stones.

During a noon break, people would have to find a spacious location with no growing trees in order to make it easy enough to dig a hole, gather stones, and light fire.

Once a troupe arrived at those spots, they could start taking rest.

Eiji and the rest were having a break before their evening meal.

Since they wouldn't resume their trip after that, it was decided that everyone would start with the preparations for making camp.

Eiji stood up quickly soon after it began.

He wanted to make up the time he had been sitting idly on the oxcart with some labor.

Immediately after jumping off the cart, Eiji surveyed the camp site and rushed with the construction of a kiln.

He built a pile of arranged stones and gathered dried leaves and branches from a forest.

Despite there being a forest, the outside of the path was covered with trees in every direction.

The search for necessary materials took just a while.

Even those villagers who had been forced to go on foot felt gratified upon watching Eiji's striving appearance.

Perhaps it was due to their status difference that such thing occurred. However, it wouldn't be strange for them to feel displeased at that unfair treatment.

Because those people who were from the same village would get on with him in the future, Eiji thought he had to be more sensible in his actions.

Despite that, Dante remained in his seat, unconcerned, which made everyone cast a critical eye at him.

It would be different if Dante was someone completely foreign, like Franko, but, in the end, one would probably think of him as Eiji's disciple.

Was it due to the adverse effect of him being brought up in an environment where people would constantly bow towards him?

It seemed that Dante wasn't good at being mindful about his surroundings.

Had he tagged along with Eiji as his disciples, Eiji would've been able to give Dante some emphasis. Nonetheless, because of Franko, they were considered a troupe.

I thought it was best to entrust Dante with the matter of self-discipline, but perhaps it should've been better to give him some advice. – Such were Eiji's thoughts.

– Eiji-san, if you've other things to do, then leave the rest to us.

– Is that so? Then, I'll count on you.

Bernardo, who was one of the villagers that had followed, was in the middle of throwing raw food into a pot.

Once Eiji left his seat, he took a chisel, koyasuke, and a gennou hammer(1) used by stonemasons and proceeded back to his kiln.

A koyasuke is a tool used for splitting stones with a blade that's around 4-5 cm in length. Its cutting notch on a stone surface is similar to that of a line, and its final impact resembles a tool dividing a stone with a whack.

A chisel, on the other hand, is used by stonemasons for adjusting stones. However, besides just stones, a chisel has range of applications, which makes it difficult to classify it.

– What do you plan to do with those tools?

– No, you might as well consider what I'm doing as adding some adjustments to the kiln. I'm thinking about making it easier for use from now on, you see.

Picking a single stone up in his hand, Eiji inserted it between his legs and hit with the chisel.

Originally, the nicely sharpened chisel was supposed to be used for

goods delivery, but, because there were spares left, it wouldn't be a problem to use them instead.

Swinging lightly with the gennou, Eiji continued to carve the surface of the stone.

When forging iron, it's necessary to use a chisel.

That's why, even if he had to use it on a stone, for Eiji, the control of the chisel felt the same as using his hand.

There were some spots that felt different when using it on the stone, but Eiji could get used to them as long he did his work prudently.

He proceeded with smoothening the uneven surface of the stone.

Clang, crack.

Clang, crack.

As the systematic rhythm went on, the stone continued to form 1,2,3 sides.

The rough stone continued to take a brick-like shape that could be more easily applied to construction.

exhale – Before Eiji noticed, there were people gathering around him with their eyes focusing on his hands.

An astonished, or rather, dumbfounded-like expression appeared on Franko's face.

– You're truly versatile, aren't you?

– Franko-san..... this is similar to iron sharpening, which I do every day inside my workshop.

– Still, it feels to me you can make anything.

– Certainly not! I'm fully aware there are lots of things I can't do.

Had there been more people to help with masonry, Eiji would have probably been able to do his job far quicker and more accurate.

Accidentally, there were none that accompanied him.

What's more, because the people in his village were all busy, they most likely had no opportunity to watch and study other people working.

Rather than saying Eiji was incredible, it was the feeling of curiosity that made people gather their attention at him.

Had I know this would happen, I'd have crafted more chisels – is what he thought.

Notes

1. It's an odd hammer that is only found in Japan. Here's a site if you want more info : [link](#)

Chapter 86 – Katharina's Father

The outskirts of the city of Nazioni

Even there, the stone-made streets, stores, and houses were no different from the rest of the city.

The carefully and firmly built stone-made homes were unlike those wooden-made ones with cracks found in Siena.

Despite that, was it due to the lack of conservation? Somehow, their surrounding gave off a lonesome feeling.

The moment Eiji confirmed a house in front of him, Dante spoke.

– This one here is Katharina's house.

– Thank you, Dante. I think I've mentioned it before, but, don't tell Katharina about my arrival here.

– Got it. I don't go back on my words, so I promise.

Dante's manner of speaking was curt, but nevertheless, he made a deliberate promise and guided Eiji while being careful not to grab any attention from the public.

There was no way for Dante to be inconsiderate to toward others' needs.

I'll expect the same from you when we return – Leaving those words behind, Dante walked away. Once he left, Eiji knocked on the door of the house.

After a while of silence, the door slightly opened.

The inside of the house was dim, which felt as though its atmosphere reflected the image of the house's owner.

A man with an unshaved face stood in the doorframe.

His eyes were dull with no signs of life, and his cheeks became

skinny from exhaustion.

Despite Katharina being an ingenious person, is this how her father looks like?

Eiji received a deep shock inside his heart without realizing it.

Get hold of yourself, Eiji. You've come here to carry out an urgent talk. – Eiji thought so as he

braced himself and strived to make a smiling expression, to the best of his ability.

–Yes?

– Are you by any chance, Katharina-san's father?

– Yes. Did something happen to my daughter?

– There's something important I need to discuss with you regarding her future. May I enter inside?

–Please come in.

The man seemed to hesitate in inviting Eiji, but, he opened the door as if being prepared.

Following that, Eiji noticed one of the man's arms bending in a false way.

His arm was most likely fractured without receiving a proper treatment.

The front of his elbow was twisted from its original place as well, which emitted a strong sense of discomfort from looking at it.

Was the man's leg also in bad shape? He was dragging along one of his legs and swaying with his body while limping.

Eiji didn't know what was the reason of the man's injury.

However, what he could think of the best was a war.

That's because an after-war injury would continue to remain like this.

Or could it be that the man sustained his injury from a work accident? Or perhaps, from falling from high places?

Even if his fractures were to recover, the man would still be forced to live somehow.

No matter how much of a burden his injury was, he would have to carry on his daily life.

Naturally, each person has their own circumstances.

And everyone suffers, more or less, in an unnoticeable way.

Nonetheless, this man's life is indeed a struggle by itself – Eiji thought.

– Please take your seat. With my condition like this, I cannot offer you much of a warm reception, but....

– No, you don't have to mind about that.

– Then, what kind of a talk do you wish to have? Somehow, it appears to be related to my daughter, still...

– Before that, allow me to introduce myself. My name is Eiji and I come from the village of Siena. Right now, Katharina is working at my blacksmith workshop as an apprentice.

– O, Oh.

The man seemed to be flustered at Eiji showing his manners.

Good grief – that person responded while shaking his head lightly from side to side.

And then, adjusting his sitting posture, he displayed his good behavior.

– I apologize for losing some of my composure. My name is Stephan. So is it true that my daughter has been in your care at your place? Has she been causing you any trouble?

– No, she has been working with much diligence and has helped me a lot in everyday tasks.

– You mean it...? It makes me feel at ease. Is that girl currently in the city?

– No, she remained in the village due to her own circumstances. I've come to discuss with you on that matter.

– She won't be coming back....? Please tell me more about it.

Stephan nodded in agreement while putting an agonized face as he listened to Eiji's story.

Eiji told him about Katharina receiving Nazioni's order and becoming his adopted child, as well as marrying Eiji.

As Stephan listened carefully to his talk, his expression turned gradually stiff.

– Is that so....? It may be because she wants to protect me.

– Protect, you?

– Yes. I cannot move properly with this body of mine. For that reason, my daughter has decided to receive the ruler's protection and have him exempt me from taxes.

When someone is impaired and unable to work, it's necessary for that person to receive care.

It appeared that some sort of reparation was needed for that person to survive in a rough world.

Even in the present Japan, there probably aren't many organizations that can provide its people with public assistance.

Certainly, it was a rough topic.

– So this is why she aspired to become my disciple, right?

– It is most likely as you say.

– Then, Stephan-san, what's your opinion about that?

At his question, Stephan remained silent for a while.

Just what's the matter.....? – Eiji wondered

Stephan's eyes were slowly sinking inside.

They were gloomy and reminiscent of a deep sea where no light could reach its bottom.

– Stating one's opinion, I, have no such grand privilege. Whenever that girl makes a decision, I can only accept it.

– No way.... Why are you saying such thing?

– That's because I'm someone who's lived in my daughter's shadow. Are you telling me that a person who can't take care of himself, like me, is in position of expressing my own view? Eiji-san, you are a big-hearted person. If, there is something that makes my daughter struggle with, would you please assist her? I beg you.

Eiji felt at a loss for words as Stephan deeply bowed down in his direction.

Judging from his point of view, it was quite an unusual scenery that unfolded before his eyes.

Why does a parent, like Stephan, overlooks his own child being used for political purposes?

– I do understand your viewpoint, Stephan-san.

– Were we able to reach an understanding?

– Yes. That's why, it cannot be helped. I will just convey to you what I think.

– What could it be?

– I'm already a married person. What's more, I don't intend to enter into another marriage with Katharina-san. Therefore, I am here today to refuse the ruler.

– R, Really.....? However, will he let your decision pass unnoticed?

– It's not about whether it will pass or not. I will have him agree.

His statement was filled with spirit.

That's right. Eiji couldn't let the ruler do as he please, if not, Eiji himself would be fed up with being exploited.

– You seem to be unusually strong-willed..... Otherwise, you would not be able to deny the ruler's order.

– If possible, I want to ask you, Stephan-san, for any advice in dealing with Katharina-san. Still, that too looks to be a hard task.

–I don't think I will be of any help.

If only this body was perfectly healthy. – Eiji had the feeling as if Stephan wanted to mutter something of that accord.

– Understood. I will give it some thoughts so that nothing bad occurs to her.

– Forgive me for being insistent, but that girl is truly a good child who cares for her father. Please help her by any mean.

– She is also my disciple, you see. I won't neglect my responsibility after taking care of her.

– Thank you very much.

Being deeply bowed down at, Eiji could no longer find a response.

To be honest, Eiji wanted to have Stephan cooperate with him and convince Katharina not to enter into the marriage. Nevertheless, that wish didn't look like it will come to fruition.

So as not to become any more of a burden to Stephan, Eiji decided to leave that place.

As soon as he announced his intention, Stephan guided him to the exit while having hard times with moving by himself.

And then, the door closed down slowly.

I wonder, what is it?

Eiji felt a bit empty inside of him.

That's because the reality was quite different from what he had

expected as a response from Stephan.

He believed Stephan would do whatever it would take to save his daughter.

Later, Eiji thought about having them move to Siena and looking after the both of them.

But, he didn't obtain the result he desired.

I guess it can't be helped. – Eiji, who thought so while just about to leave, suddenly heard a small voice from behind the door.

– Katharina, I'm sorry....I'm sorry....! I failed you as a father. Please forgive me....!

A subdued voice mixed with slight weeping leaked through the door.

Eiji turned around and left the spot as if pretending not to hear.

As he clenched his fist, Eiji swore inside his heart he would do anything in his power.

Chapter 87 – Dante's Past

The place Eiji was led to resembled a reception room.

Things that one could find inside were a table, a monopod chair, and flowers arranged in a vase.

The room was most likely a resting room for guests who were awaiting their meeting with Nazioni.

Eiji looked around its interior while sitting in a chair.

There was a garden that he could stare at from a window in the room.

The beautifully trimmed garden gave a distinct impression from what he had seen on this island til now.

It was taken care of so pointlessly much that it was, so to speak, ghastly.

As Eiji was drinking water from the present jug, the door opened.

The one who appeared from it was Dante.

It wasn't that surprising, as this place belonged to Dante's family.

– Howdy. What's up? I bet you're feeling nervous.

– Dante, what's the matter?

Eiji would lie were he to tell Dante he didn't feel nervous.

After all, he was going to oppose the ruler.

Even though it was for the sake of protecting his beliefs, Eiji knew he was overdoing it a bit.

And when it came to the time right before his meeting, Eiji was even more aware of that fact, whether he liked it or not.

Not being related to Eiji's concern, Dante replied smoothly.

– I was appointed to accompany you during your meeting.

– Is that so? Then, I wonder if it's already the time for that.

– Just wait a little bit. It appears my father is preparing to meet you.

– Shall we hold a short conversation together? Dante, I wonder what kind of a person your father is to you.

– My father.....? That's right.

Dante was, so to speak, the closest person to Nazioni in his family. Perhaps, by asking him, Eiji will be able to grasp more about Nazioni's nature, instead of just knowing him broadly as a statesman until now.

Dante held his tongue and pondered for a while, but in the end, he started to mutter few words.

– Truth be told, my father and I aren't quite on good terms. Rather than that, I wonder if it's better to say he won't even look at me. For him, I'm someone he couldn't care less about. Well, I'm not the only one who isn't getting along with my father; my brothers also don't get along with him. Still, because they're more outstanding than me, it doesn't look like he has had any expectations in me from the beginning.

Dante began to talk about his story little by little, the content of which made Eiji become astonished.

For Eiji, being 1st or 3rd didn't change the fact of one being someone's son.

Naturally, such a thing matters when it comes to fulfilling one's duty as an heir, however, it should most likely not affect the way one's treated.

Despite saying so, Eiji too had heard stories from elderly people about households where the eldest son would be adored the most.

The second son would act as an insurance in case something happens and receive his fair amount of treatment. As for the third son and the later ones, one could describe their reception as being indifferent.

If one was to explain why people used to cherish their family business above individuals, then one would probably point at that.

– Then, Dante, what's your opinion on your father?

– Don't get me wrong.

Was it something he hated to be asked about?

At Eiji's question, Dante shook his head on sides.

However, no anger was seen on his face.

– I regard my father highly. Did you know? During the previous war, the city of Nazioni was in the center of wartime destruction.

– No, this is the first I've heard of it.

Nazoni was placed right in the middle of the island.

The city, which was a village at that time, could be easily turned into a battlefield due to soldiers running into each other from all sides. As a result, Nazoni appeared to sustain heavy damages.

Back then, Dante could barely remember the view as he was probably still too young.

– This trampled down place began to change once my father took over after my grandfather, who had passed away. Being proactive in making new allies on the west side, he took the advantage and rushed to the battlefield. And then, the war started to shift in favor of the east. Back then, my father seemed to possess a strength comparable with that of a fierce god or something similar. Rumor has it that he wouldn't sustain even a single injury on the battlefield. With the war being put to an end thanks to his efforts, Nazoni was no longer a village but a governing body of the whole island, and my father has been considered as a hero.

An untold part of the war, the story that had been ambiguously retold by everyone. Eiji felt strange upon learning about it.

Just how much is the hostility from other villagers toward their ruler justified?

However, saying he didn't incur a single injury on the battlefield sounded absurd.

Eiji too thought at once, but, if Nazoni had suffered a minor injury from an arrow, there would've been lots of complications resulting from suppuration.

In ancient times, being able to live through a war without an injury was perhaps quite important for a society.

– After the war concluded, my father, who had been the hardest fighter, became a peacemaker. With his first order, he decided to restore our village. Since Nazoni, at which my father stationed, was the most wasted and declined place, he wouldn't listen to anyone's advice. Despite saying so, he strengthened the defense of the city and made sure that no other war would occur. And then, he requisitioned for blacksmiths who specialized in bronze casting from other villages and built up our potential, or so it appears. My father is

well aware of the fact that we are being detested by other people for imposing these methods.

-Dante, why are you going to such extent in telling me that?
- Certainly, it may be true that he doesn't hold any interest in me, and that I had been doing nothing but bad deeds back when I lived in this city, but, as expected, father is still someone I deeply admire. That's why, Eiji, I wanted you to know more about him.

Dante laughed while rubbing his nose shyly.

- What? So you've finally become aware of your own mistakes?
- Y, Yeah.....
- If time allows us in the future, let's talk more about smithing.
- Really.....?

He asked with a dumbfounded attitude, but, Eiji wouldn't let Dante off just because he had told him that much.

Nevertheless, being able to reminisce on his own mistakes wasn't a bad thing.

- Now that I think back on it, father has always been in solitary. Well, I can somehow understand him not taking a liking to me after grandfather died, but I hate those stupid brothers' attitude of making me a fool of, you see.
- So your brothers won't consider you as their ally?
- That's because we have different mothers.

Dante's mother was a concubine.

Back when Dante had just been born, there were also times when Dante would receive favorable treatment thanks to his mother being loved by Nazioni.

However, that would worsen at once after his mother had died from an illness.

Is human love supposed to be this cold hearted?

No matter what he did, Eiji couldn't think of treating his and Tanya's own child that way.

- Being the 3rd son and a potential heir, I thought I could do as I pleased with anyone around me. After all, I was the son of the ruler. Nobody would say anything as nobody would object to me. The only person to speak to me would be someone like Franko. Therefore, at

that time, I was truly surprised and annoyed at being knocked down by you, Eiji.

- You could say you reap what you sow.
- But now, I've come to understand a bit of myself from back then.
- This is what you call being a grown-up, right?

Ahh, well, it was my bad – Dante turned around at Eiji's words as if trying to dodge the question.

He was most likely feeling bashful.

- It's about time to go.
- Thank you Dante. Thanks to you, I feel more relieved now.
- You mean it? I don't know what you plan to do, but, you have my support.
- I'll do my best.
- Fine, then, I shall guide you. You better follow me!

Standing up, Dante opened the door and went out.

It wasn't just Eiji and Nazioni's distance that shrank.

He felt he bore no remaining grudge against Dante from the day they first met.

Chapter 88 – The Meeting with the Ruler (first part)

It was a spacious audition room.

Inside, there was a rug laid out in the middle and bronze-made ornaments placed closed to the room's walls that radiated dazzlingly with a golden color.

On both sides of its entrance, there were 2 men standing at attention while holding weapons.

And then, there was a splendid throne set inside the room.

So this is the ruler of Nazioni.....?!

The ruler's appearance was seriously huge.

His hair was abundant just like a lion's mane and his eyes' pupils were similar to that of a bird of prey.

Wearing a deep crimson mantle on him, the man was as tall as Philip when compared together.

The word 'majestic' would describe this giant the best.

Eiji was well aware he was Dante's father.

If one was to give Dante an appropriate age, change his easy-going attitude, and add more graveness to it, he would most likely become the second Nazioni.

Nazoni observed Eiji with pleasant eyes.

It was as though a slight chill passed through right after their eyes met.

Eiji could sense a heavy pressure, which made him want to step back unintentionally.

It seemed that Nazioni being regarded as a hero wasn't just for show.

They both had yet to exchange words with each other.

Am I supposed to take him on as my opponent, refuse his request, and make him consent to my explanation.....?

Thinking so, Eiji felt like he was losing his strength.

Don't be stupid. Are you going to accept his conditions just like that?

There's no way for you to submit. – Eiji reconsidered once again.

Following Dante, who had guided him til here, Eiji stood in front of the throne.

He was neither told to sit nor kneel, however, Eiji casted down his eyes so as not to be rude.

– Raise your head.

– Yes.

The one to give him the command was Franko, who stood next Nazioni.

Franko was a man who would usually give off a strong impression; nevertheless, even his presence felt somehow overshadowed when standing next to this ruler.

Nazioni made a broad grin.

His big canine teeth, which showed through, resembled that of a wild animal.

– So you're the blacksmith from Siena named Eiji, right? You have done a great effort by coming all this way. Dante, that's enough, you can now withdraw.

– No, I've already gone through this much trouble, so I'm going to watch.

It was a heavy bass sound which reverberated in one's stomach just like a rattle.

There was quite lots of charm in his voice.

At Dante's response, Nazioni laughed with an enjoyable face as if witnessing something unusual.

– For you to take part in government affairs, just what kind of change have you gone through?

This guy is indeed amusing.

– Even I have grown up a bit.

– *Sfx for snorting* Well, fine by me. Just stay close to the wall and don't interrupt us.

As soon as Dante did so, Nazioni shifted his eyes again at Eiji.

It looked like Nazioni had not the slightest interest in his son.

One could sense disdain and cold-heartedness from his voice and

look.

It couldn't be helped for his attitude to go off the rails that much.

Or perhaps, he had already given up on Dante due to his bad behavior?

– Speaking of which, you have been looking after that foolish, useless son of mine, right? It must have been troublesome for you.

– No, I do not think he was that much of a bother. Recently, he has been growing up and working more diligently each day.

– I wonder how much of that is true.... Well, nevermind. I shall hear more on that once we conclude our business. Franko, explain to him the detail of our discussion.

– Yes.

Franko gazed at Eiji as he stood in front of him.

As always, his expression was difficult to be read out.

Just how much had Eiji gone through because of that man?

Eiji needed to pay attention so as not to reveal his feeling of loath he felt towards Franko.

There was no way for him to incur their displeasure.

– Eiji, I would like to express my deepest thanks for your hard work during this time's tax collection. That being the case, we shall put the offered tools into practice and have you explain their usage. Since it's much easier to explain in words, this time we have called up each engineer for that.

At Franko's words, men who had been waiting on standby somewhere else entered the room.

Again, there were tools that had been brought and lined up by soldiers. Carpentry tools were accompanied by wood, whereas, masonry tools – stone. They were all set and ready to be dealt with.

Tidying them up will be quite bothersome, won't it? – Eiji stood in front of the tools while having such worthless thoughts.

– Here we have a saw, a plane, and a set of chisels. Since carpenters here seem to be more familiar with chisels, I will first demonstrate how the saw and the plane work.

– Where, where? Make a space so that I can see.

– Nazioni-sama, if you say so, there won't be any meaning in calling

those workmen.

– It should be fine as long I have them line up around me.

It appeared that Nazioni was deeply interested in the new tools.

With Nazioni wanting to be in the front row, Franko and the soldiers tagged close to him while maintaining the order.

He was standing and looking at Eiji, whereas, the workmen were observing and studying on their knees.

Good grief, I guess people must feel burdened whenever their superior says something on a whim. – he thought.

– According to what I have heard, you usually use hatchets for shaving wood, right? With this saw here you can keep a straight cross-section when dividing the wood. Thanks to this tool, it is possible to make rectangular pillars with ease.

Placing his foot on a wooden material, Eiji attached the saw's blade to it.

A saw won't simply change its route.

At first, Eiji sawed gently and carefully, and then, he continued to add more strength into once the saw's cutting became rhythmical.

The blade of the saw wasn't actually horizontal. It was much more thick and similar to a wedge in shape.

Were it to be even, the saw would get stuck in wood immediately after it began to cut, and as a result, become unable to move.

sfx for saw cutting x2 – Each time the noisy sound of the saw cutting was produced, Eiji understood that the woodworkers and carpenters present there were getting excited.

As the wood chips whirled up in the air, the saw kept on cutting into the wood while generating sound.

sfx for dropping – a single edge of the wood fell.

– Like this, you can cut off the wood without futility. I shall introduce you the plane as next.

Eiji was fond of demonstrating how the plane works to foreign people.

Back in Japan, his workshop wouldn't receive many foreigners for an observational study, but, it was popular for the peculiar kannan^[1].

Eiji set the plane evenly on the wood.

With his right hand, he held the plane so that its blade wrapped up from the top, and using his left hand, Eiji kept down the butt of the wood in order to support it.

As he pulled the plane before him while matching the rhythm of his body, wood shavings began to come out smoothly just like Katsuobushi^[2].

- Ohhh, what's this?
- The wood is being shaved with a terrific slenderness.
- Just how on earth is he doing it.....? Hey, try to do the same. Just what's the deal with this transparent-like thinness? What's more, look at this shaved wood. Isn't it radiating with light?
- How about you? Can you make it....?
- Don't be stupid. I wouldn't be able to, even if I were to have a pile of gold.

Shock and amazement could be noticed from workmen's voices and expressions.

With a timid attitude, one of them drew close to the wood shavings and checked them in his hands while staring at them fixedly.

And then, passing them to his colleagues, the latter slowly examined the shavings.

Nazoni talked to Eiji.

- Can I check it?
- Go ahead. Please make sure of the touch on the wood.
- Certainly, it's slippery. This is the first time for me to witness such a smooth wood.

The plane is said to be handed down from China.

In China and Korea planing wood used to center around hard pine trees. However, unlike them, in Japan, planes were mostly applied to cedars and Japanese cypress.

For that reason, a Japanese version of the plane had been specially developed.

Again, instead of just processing and lacquering wood, like in foreign countries, the advancement of planes in Japan is said to have been pushed up thanks to its people's love of plain wood.

- Fumu....This is indeed a splendid tool! Excellent, keep on

explaining the rest of the tools!

– Understood!

Being in a good mood, Nazioni requested further explanation.

Thus, Eiji began to explain the rest of the chisels with self-confidence.

The clarification of the tools had finally concluded.

The workmen tidied up all the things and withdrew from the audition room.

Only Nazioni, Franko, Dante, and the soldiers were left together with Eiji.

I guess things have been progressing quite smoothly. – He thought.

And judging from Nazioni's reactions, Eiji felt even more confident.

Without any problem, Nazioni took an interest towards Eiji and his skills.

Obviously, because of that, it was possible his actions would draw unwanted trouble. Nevertheless, by showing how useful he is, Eiji would most likely be able to increase his right to speak.

For the sake of their future negotiations, Eiji had to give Nazioni the impressions of being somebody rare.

Eiji was glad to see that its minimum condition was fulfilled.

The remaining problem would be to prepare for the topic about Katharina, but, surprisingly, Eiji didn't have to wait for it that long.

It appeared that Franko had something to say.

– Well then, Eiji. For now, you have done a splendid work. There is no doubt that your skills as a blacksmith are real, and we are convinced they will play an indispensable role in the development of this island.

– I'm honored by your praise.

– That being the case, we would like to give you a reward.

– A... reward?

So it had finally arrived. By saying 'a reward', didn't he mean Eiji would be forced to face that reality?

Indeed, this is an unexpected turn of events – Eiji made an expression indicating that.

Good grief. Have I too become able to read other people's gestures?

Just one, two years, it was something unthinkable for him to do.

– Eiji, you know that your background is little known to us. Despite that, Nazioni-sama was generous enough to consider admitting you into his clan. I believe you already know about this person as your pupil, but, think of it as courtesy from Nazioni-sama and marry his adopted daughter, Katharina. Once it is done, you shall be officially recognized as a member of the clan.

– It's a great pleasure for me to receive your offer, and I wouldn't even dream of gaining such a high opinion from you, however— I refuse.

– Wha.....?!

– Heh?

Franko opened his eyes widely from disbelief at this unexpected response.

On the other hand, Nazioni smiled to his heart's desire as if saying 'Things have got pretty interesting'.

Well, it's now or never and no failure will be accepted.

Bring it on.

Notes

1. A term used to describe Japanese planes. More on [Wikipedia](#)

2. A dried, fermented tuna. More on [Wikipedia](#)

Chapter 89 – The Meeting with the Ruler (Last part)

Franko's expression changed in the blink of an eye.

Judging from his widely opened eyes and mouth, one could tell he was trembling all over from astonishment.

As soon as his face was thought to flush quickly, it then continued to turn pale.

Was it because of his anger?

Franko's sharp look felt as though it could pierce right through a person.

Even Eiji had the feeling that something characteristic of nervousness was arising from his body.

His feet were getting cold and his stomach was tightening up with butterflies.

Eiji's consciousness was fading away while losing its sense of reality. And yet, his heart was beating hard and loudly.

Had it been his old self, Eiji would have probably been covered with chill and sweat while having his head filled with a countless number of fainthearted thoughts.

But instead, he was now experiencing some sort of oddness together with the previous feeling, which felt quite comfortable.

Also, it was somehow different from what he had felt during his previous, tense scenes.

Was it perhaps due to Eiji resolving himself?

Even if this conversation goes south, be it what it may. – Is what he probably thought.

– Pardon me, but, I couldn't hear you clearly. Please say it once more.

– 'I refuse', is what I said.

At Eiji's repeated answer, Franko bursted in anger as a result.

- Don't be a fool! We are talking here about admitting you into a ruler's clan. Do you honestly mean that by saying so?! Or perhaps, you are trying to make us look stupid?
- No, that's not in my intention. I think it's a great honor to be able to receive such an offer, but..... Nazioni-sama, I have a suggestion coming from me. By all means, would you please grant me that permission?
- Fine by me. You may speak as long it's just about our talk.
- Nazioni-sama?!

The contrast between Nazioni's and Franko's pleased and flustered expressions was intriguing.

Nazioni admonished Franko as if trying to calm him down, whereas, the latter concealed his expression for a moment while holding his head in his hand.

And then, removing the same hand, Franko assumed his cold and expressionless attitude.

Perhaps, how he was able to switch his emotions this fast was the proof of him being a first-class person.

Franko bowed down gently.

- My deepest apologies. I have managed to calm myself.
- I don't mind. Even though you're usually cunning, you're supposed to lose your composure at unexpected events from time to time, right? Don't brood over that, Franko.
- Yes.
- Look at this man's eyes. Back when I was still on the battlefield, I had seen many like him with such determination in their eyes. Franko, you have probably also witnessed the same, right?
- No, being a part of the transportation troop, I used to be quite occupied with supplying army provision. After all, it was done on Nazioni-sama's command.
- Was that so?
- Yes. Had I fought on the frontline, I'd have most likely passed away at once.

Eiji thought it was better not to interfere with their talk.

However, it appeared that Franko's manner of work as an official hadn't changed since long time ago.

There was already little food under normal circumstances.
And having to provide them during the war must have been an immense trouble for him.

- Whenever a person like him appears, you ought to be prepared and give him more attention. That's because you're not dealing with some child that throwing a tantrum but a person who's making a suggestion despite knowing what consequences his words may carry. It's a different matter whether you consent or not, but, you need to hear out that person.
- Understood. If you insist that much.... Eiji, you may speak.
- Yes.
- Oops, wait a moment.

Eiji somehow managed to set up a negotiation between both sides. While Eiji was concerned about how he should convince Nazioni, the latter stopped him.

Just what's his deal? – Once he looked at Nazioni with such question, the ruler lifted up his index finger in an enjoyable way.

- Indeed, I said I'd listen to you, but, that only applies if you bear the same risk. You and Franko shall debate with each other. Provided one of your arguments fails, it will mean the end to your suggestion.
- Certainly, that's interesting. Fufun, Eiji, did you understand?
-I do.

Debating with Franko?

Until now, Eiji's negotiations with Franko haven't gone well.

Indeed, it was better for him not to show any gap and pay attention to Franko's every word.

Taking a deep breath, Eiji began to express his own thoughts.

- As I've mentioned before, I highly respect Nazioni-sama's offer of making me into one of his own. Therefore, if you already insist on doing so, I'd like to ask whether or not you could admit me directly as your son-in-law.
- It bears absolutely no meaning whatsoever. Nobody would be interested in a man with no background, even if we were to adopt him.
- Is that so? I believe rumors about the ruler valuing others' skills

and improvement of people's life would spread. Again, if it's the problem, there's a range of villagers whom you can make use of without minding their background.

– We don't call people for that reason. The true value of marrying a ruler's daughter-in-law lies in publicity.

– Indeed, there's some truth in what you say. That's why, I was thinking about holding a wedding reception for me and a particular woman.

– Honestly, I don't get you. Then, it means you're not content with Katharina. So who's going to be that partner of yours?

At Franko, who was marveled, Eiji nodded repeatedly upon consenting.

And then, he uttered the name of a person whom nobody there would have expected.

Please, turn out alright.

– The one whom I wish to be my partner during the ceremony is the granddaughter of Siena's tribal chief, Tanya.

–Tanya? You mean that person?! Stop joking around. Aren't you both already a husband and wife?!

Excellent. Franko has swallowed the bait. – Eiji thought.

Even making him take an interest should be more than enough.

With Eiji explaining the benefits of doing so one by one, there's most likely no way for them to decline.

– That's right. Certainly, Tanya and I have already exchanged our rings and vows with each other. However, despite us being a couple, we haven't held a ceremony as such yet.

– Didn't you say you already exchanged vows with each other? Normally, it would be impossible to hold a ceremony under such circumstances.

– From the formal point of view, nobody knows about us being married, so there's a point in doing so.

– What do you mean?

– That is to say, a marriage between a man whose background is obscure and a woman who's the granddaughter of a tribal chief. It would be different in case of dwellers or tribal chiefs' families from other villages, as they wouldn't let an unknown man marry into their

family. However, it's another story when it comes to me becoming Nazioni-sama's son-in-law.

With Nazioni backing an unknown and suspicious man, even a granddaughter of a tribal chief will comply with him.

With this, it was possible for Eiji to be brazen and hold a ceremony. Not receiving any blessings from one's surroundings despite being married was a painful experience.

Eiji was concerned about Tanya, even though she didn't express dissatisfaction.

Being able to hold a gorgeous ceremony for one's wife was also one of man's traits in being reliable.

Franko made a single nod as if agreeing, but then, tilted his head.

– Still, aren't the other villages already aware of you two being a couple? I cannot think of this reception bringing any impact.

– I've already told you that our marriage will gain public recognition. And that too will be thanks to the generosity of Nazioni-sama, who cherish others skills and is willing to admit them into his clan. If I were to say, the impression of him will change as well. How about that?

Franko pondered for a while at Eiji's statement.

Perhaps, he was considering whether or not Eiji's suggestion was reasonable.

Aside from him, what was Nazioni's opinion on this?

Just how will he react to Eiji's proposal?

Judging from Nazioni's grinning look, one could hardly tell what he was thinking about.

Either way, Eiji had to be more careful about Franko's remarks.

It was a battle in which he couldn't afford to lose.

– I believe what I've been saying til now makes sense. Franko, do you have any objection?

– I do. Eiji, isn't Tanya right now in her pregnancy? Even if we hold a reception for you, her pregnant look will bring a bad reputation. People will consider that as sleeping together before one's marriage.

– Despite me telling you about the proposal today, it's not like we'll be holding the ceremony tomorrow. After all, making preparations

and gathering people takes time. Meanwhile, Tanya will deliver our child.

– The birth delivery is something close to a gamble. What do you intend to do if both mother and child die accidentally after we arrange the reception?

– I cannot reply to that kind of inconsiderate question, but, even that would be too much of a miserable outcome..... Regardless of that, shouldn't it be fine if we just inform others about an unforeseen event?

At Franko's rude words, Eiji raised his voice.

Nevertheless, it was purely coming his true intention.

Franko shouldn't have said such ominous words.

– Kuku, Franko, what's the matter? Aren't you having a hard time there?

– I see. Indeed, it seems like you've given it a lot of thought. Then, Eiji, what do you intend to do with Katharina? I've already talked with her, but how do you plan to take up the responsibility for Katharina?

Eiji was taken by surprise for a moment.

He was self-confident about being able to answer any question regarding Siena village and Tanya.

In order to knead a counterplan, he even went through the trouble of consulting with Tanya and Bona.

Nonetheless, he didn't consider Katharina in his plan.

Eiji felt sorry about her, but, in the end, she was just a stranger to him.

Katharina was a cute disciple, however, he couldn't think of her of someone close to Tanya who was part of his family.

And it was all the more reason in this type of negotiation.

One could describe him as being cold-hearted, but, that's all there was to it. For Eiji, she was just another human being.

Eiji had no time to ponder about it that much.

Seeing how he became at a loss for words, Franko put a smile from satisfaction.

That was indeed a bad situation.

Eiji couldn't tell what kind of judgment they would pass down were

he to hesitate for any longer.

.....That's right. In the first place, it wasn't me who started this problem.

Shouldn't Franko be the one to hold the responsibility?

– I would say this is an uncommon case. To begin with, this wouldn't have happened had you talked to us first, but instead, you barked up the wrong tree by seeking the responsibility from us. Franko, it's you who should be taking up the responsibility.

– You're saying I'm the one who's responsible?

– Yes. To begin with, it's hard for me to comprehend why you tried to force such an important thing as a marriage on me despite saying it was my reward.

– Kukuku.....fuhahahahaha!

Just what is happening? – At Nazioni's sudden burst of laughter, everyone who had gathered trembled with their body while looking at him questionably.

Nazioni was tapping his laps and coughing violently with teary eyes. Having difficulty in expressing himself, he spoke toward Franko.

– Isn't it rare for you to suffer a complete defeat like this? Franko, your ability to manage is, without a doubt, second to none when it comes to drawing a plan of development or taxation. But, just like I've been telling you all this time, you have no eye for people.

– You mean so.....? No, I guess Nazioni-sama is right. Certainly, it's a weakness of mine.

– It's fine as long you are aware of that. Those who are incompetent in their labor are the worst ones.

A hue of shyness resurfaced on Franko's face.

Not paying attention to Franko, Nazioni turned his attention toward Eiji.

– Eiji, as your reward, I'll grant you this.

– Yes, what could it be?

– You may accept or decline whichever proposal you want coming from tribal chiefs. I permit you to use my name for that.

– M, My happiness and gratitude know no bounds.....!

Without being aware, Eiji's back trembled from joy.
Just how much did he wish for those words to be said?
With that, Eiji's plan was achieved, as this time it was his victory!

Still, it was quite apologetic for him to be content with that much.
Having something thrown at him in a casual manner by Nazioni, Eiji caught it hurriedly.

- Use this.
- This is?
- The key to my vault. You can choose and take out 3 items at your own discretion. For you to make so much fuss over a single girl, named Tanya, she must be one precious wife. I won't mind even if you take some ornaments.
- My happiness and gratitude know no bounds.

Eiji bowed down while feeling deepest gratitude.

- Do you have any other suggestion?
- No, I don't have any.
- Excellent, then, what's left is to solve the problem with Katharina. Do you happen to know anyone whom she could marry?
- I apologize, but.... I don't possess such knowledge.

Was there nobody unmarried among the villagers in Siena? – Eiji tried to think of something, but with him being deeply connected with the executives in the village, he only knew those who were already married.

His very first disciple, Pietro was too young. In the first place, he already had a fiancée.

Not to mention, during these 2 years, he was still shy about improving his relationship.

While Eiji was sinking in his own thoughts, an unexpected voice was raised.

- Since you've already talked with Katharina, I'll be the one to look after her.
- Dante....
- D, Don't get me wrong. I don't care what happens to me. It's just that I feel obliged to take up the responsibility as a part of a ruler's

family.

– Ku, Kuhaha....! For that inexperienced and stupid son of mine to feel responsible, could it be..... Hey!

– What.....?

– Have you fallen in love?

– *.....!*

Feeling ashamed, Dante's face dyed itself red.

But, is that so? Could it be that Dante.... Now that I think about it, there were indeed lots of times when he would make frivolous talks.

– If Dante is unmarried, it's still possible for Katharina to become a member. What's more, I see no problem in the aspect of reputation. The remaining thing would be whether she agrees or not.

– Umu, isn't the whole thing settled then? Afterwards, make preparations for those two to talk with each other. I too have to have a personal talk with Dante as father and son.

– Understood.

– Excellent, then, that's all from me. I hope your wifey will be able to deliver a healthy and sound child.

– Thank you very much. Again, as soon as the birth delivery is done, I shall greet Nazioni-sama once again.

– By that time, we will most likely have the reception arranged.

I guess he isn't the type of man who would lose to his personality. I may have misunderstood him a bit. With this, perhaps there's a chance for us to avoid a rebellion.

– Ah, speaking of which, Eiji.

– Yes? What is it?

– I wanted to ask you one thing, but....

By the time Eiji was about to leave the room while feeling relieved and exhausted, the voice of Nazioni reached him from behind.

Eiji stopped and turned around.

What appeared there was a demon wearing a fully satisfied smile.

– What would you've done had your suggestion failed?

– Well, I wonder about that. I didn't think about it since I believed you would grant me the permission to speak no matter what.

– Nevertheless, it's no longer actually matters, right?

– It does. Most likely, I don't have to worry any more about that.

Glaring at each other, the two of them replied with great calmness while putting smiles on their faces.

There was no way for Eiji to let Nazioni know his true intention.

Had the latter learned about Eiji's plan of rebellion, not only would their talk have failed, but also, Eiji and the rest would most likely be punished.

Eiji felt a great nervousness beneath his expression.

– Well, I guess that's fine. From now, you're my son-in-law, so let's get along with each other. Starting from today, you will probably be entrusted with lots of jobs, however, not just as a blacksmith but also as a member of my clan. Therefore, work hard.

– Understood. I shall become your strength with my humble skills.

Good grief, he won't make a sophisticated ruler for too long. And even his reputation won't become reliable. – He thought

Eiji left as soon as he bowed down.

Chapter 90 – The Son-in-Law

Eiji took a breath the moment he withdrew from the audition room. It was a tense discussion that made him sweat on his back. Still, at least, he could consider it as something that paid off. Soon after, Franko, who had left the room at nearly the same time, approached Eiji.

- I'll guide you to the vault.
- Suddenly, you started to be more polite in talking with me, didn't you?
- Despite you and Nazioni-sama not having binding a contract as a parent and child yet, you have already become his son, you see. It's just natural for me to change the way I treat you.
- When it comes to that, I guess you're doing a fine job indeed.
- That's simply habit. There are many occasions in which I think it's better to follow things as they are. Still, I do agree that there is as well a huge number of times when it's not the case.

Is this what people refer to as being an official who strongly adheres to the rules?

People like that are capable, but seem to have hard times in their daily life.

Eiji, who used to be described as a stubborn and honest person, gave such an evaluation.

After a short walk, they both reached their destination.

The vault was solidly closed and secured with an unusually firm lock.

Franko opened it as he was in charge of the key.

kacha – the sound of an opening lock was heard as the key twisted smoothly.

Judging from its sound, Eiji could understand that the lock had been scrupulously maintained.

- Please enter in.
- Well then, pardon the intrusion.

A pitch black interior appeared in front of him once he passed

through the vault's thick door, however, the interior gave out the feeling of being swept regularly without much of dust.

It was quite a spacious room.

The entrance was lit thanks to the light coming from the hallway, but nevertheless, Eiji couldn't see the majority of the vault's interior.

- It's rare for anyone to enter into this place.
- You mean it? Makes me feel privileged.
- There are lots of people who haven't seen this place even once despite already serving Nazioni-sama.
- How about Franko-san?
- Rather than being on the side that gets rewarded, I've been managing this place for a long time, you see.

Franko lit a torch.

What came in their view following that were numerous ornaments, gorgeous clothes and pieces of cloth, valuable stockfish, and earthenware.

Considering their display, Eiji had the feeling like he was observing articles in a museum, or some kind of a shop.

Eiji looked around restlessly while checking the room.

- Ohh, this is incredible.
- That's because all these high-grade products come from offerings, you see. This place gathers all specialties from every single place on the island. Even though it's true, we are still losing in terms of amount to Mostori, which lies in the west.
- You mean the place in which Pierro resides? Isn't it because they trade items?
- That's most likely the case.

Certainly, Eiji could remember that village's warehouse overflowing with surprisingly many different items.

Grabbing articles on shelves one by one, Eiji was thinking which one would suit Tanya the best.

For instance, how about a brooch that matches her long hair?

There was an exquisite, agate-made, cameo brooch^[W] among the items.

The way it was carved made it look like it was designed for women.

Eiji didn't know about the local culture here, but the brooch seemed to represent some sort of goddess.

I wonder if this will do.....

And then, his second choice was a fabric used to make clothes. The one he found was a cotton cloth, which was known for its unusually high price. However, the texture coming from this one was unexpectedly bad.

Perhaps, it could be due to the lack of high-level weaving methods. Still, no matter how smooth this cotton fabric would be, it was clear that there were small twists on it.

Was this dyed with madder? I'll take a single piece.
I wonder if we can make a pair of skirt and a shirt from this.

Eiji then pondered about his third choice.
I have an ornament and a cloth.
If I could give Tanya a high priced gift as the remaining thing.....
Ohh, this one looks to be nice.

What Eiji took in his hand was, honey.
As soon as he opened the lid of a jar full of honey, a sweet fragrance arose into the air.
In this period, things with a sweet taste were considered a top grade luxury.
Licking this honey alone is tasty enough, but, perhaps she would be much happier, were we to make biscuits and cookies using this. – He thought.
Eiji was thankful that basic ingredients such as wheat, eggs, and butter were present inside their village.
What's more, the sweet taste plays an important role too as it has lots of calories.
Eiji also wanted for their own child to get proper nutrition.

– I'd like to have these three.
– Understood. I shall have them prepared and delivered to your home.
– Please do so.

It was decided that Eiji would sleep separately from the other

villagers who tagged along with him.

Eiji was given a private room, whereas, the others would be sleeping together in a huddle inside a single, big room.

Rather than for a hard work, it was a side benefit given to those who were rewarded.

Nazioni's private room was found in the deepest part of his mansion. In order to reach that place, one had to walk through a narrow hallway with extremely small daylight windows.

Was this perhaps one of their defense countermeasures?

Even if an enemy was to attack, it would be much easier to protect were the hallway more narrowed, allowing only one person to pass from the other side.

While imagining that, Eiji knocked on the room's door as he required permission first before entering.

– Yo, you've made some good effort by coming here, haven't you?

– I believe I've introduced myself to you some time ago, but, my name is Eiji. Please treat me well.

– Well, take your seat.

– Pardon me for my intrusion.

Nazioni's room wasn't that large.

There was furniture such as a working desk, chairs, a guest table, and a large bed.

And with some shelves inside, the room didn't look that strange.

Every single item was placed neatly in order.

Could it be that Nazioni was the one in charge of that?

Or perhaps, somebody else took care of tidying up?

Eiji felt like he witnessed something unpredictable.

What he imagined at first was a more luxurious, gaudy, and palatial residence worthy of heroes to be living in.

Nazioni had probably read Eiji's mind from his queer-looking expression as he began to explain.

– I too keep saying this, but, I'm not the kind of person who's attached to things. Just what's the deal in staring at gold's luster? How's that supposed to make my heart race? Rather than that, it's way more enjoyable to hunt some deer with a bow and skewer

wolves.

- Then, what is the purpose of you dressing up during a meeting?
- Well, that's because there's no pride in having a dull look.

There was some truth in what Nazioni said.

Indeed, one's outward appearance would most likely give a strong impact.

Nonetheless, Eiji couldn't comprehend Nazioni's interest with hunting.

Despite saying so, people who are hooked on hunting certainly exist. There were rumors about German nobles going on a hunt each day. As well as accounts of aristocrats from medieval times who enjoyed hunting.

And even in the modern Japan, there are people who will request a gun permit for hunting.

Still, Eiji couldn't share the same feelings.

- First, there's something I need to tell you.
- What might it be?
- That foolish son of mine has been in your care all this time. For that, you have my gratitude.
- P, Please wait a moment.

Eiji became flustered.

Nazioni, who would usually look arrogant, bowed down toward him.

- As his father, it's my responsibility to thank you. I couldn't figure out any way to make that stupid son become more honest, still, you've done a good job doing it in my stead.
- Indeed, he was bad tempered at first, but, it's not like I've done anything in particular. People won't just change because of certain someone, and I think Dante himself wanted to change, so it happened.
- It doesn't appear as such to me, but.... well.
- Even among one's family, there are many things people tend not to see.
- Is that true?

Nazioni asked in a curious way.

Was there some sort of a reason behind Dante's irritable attitude? It was as though one couldn't guess.

It felt more like it was due to Dante's surroundings where nobody would recognize him that Dante's insolent attitude had been shaped. Still, Eiji couldn't be sure about that.

- Well then, should we make a toast?
- A toast?
- Yeah, take out the wine cups.
- Understood.

Nazioni continued to pour wine in splendid wine cups made from pure gold.

Certainly, there are people who could see their dazzling radiance as something possessing a devilish charm.

The wine seemed as though it was releasing a mysterious-like fragrance.

- I, Nazioni, shall hereby declare to treat Eiji as my son, just like a blood-related one, from now on.
- Please treat me well.

The ancient romans were said to be fond of zinc-made wine cups, but, even drinking from a golden one felt tasty enough for Eiji.

As he was slowly drinking his wine cup, his body began to feel nice and warm.

- What's that? Could it be you're not good at holding your liquor?
- I guess so. I think I should refrain from drinking much.
- It's fine. Were you to get totally drunk, you would be unable to last for the next two days.
- That's sounds quite like a hell.
- Then, shall we have a small talk with each other before getting drunk?
- What is it?

Nazioni smiled in a pleasant way.

And then, out of blue, he threw out a bombshell statement.

- Won't you retire from being a blacksmith prematurely and help us with the management of this island?

Chapter 91 – One's Policy

Just, what on earth is this person talking about?

Is he serious? Is he saying that earnestly?

If that's true, things will turn into a big deal.

It was unheard of for a country ruler to surrender his position for the sake of a person who wasn't even blood-related.

After all, Eiji wasn't some sort of authority figure, like the three sovereigns and five emperors from China.

However, even those came from a legend that was half true and half false.

Being left open-mouthed and at a loss for words, Eiji kept silent for a while.

It was as though he couldn't read Nazioni's mind.

– How about that?

– Even if I'm asked like that.... it's troublesome, you know. Still, I can't agree on that.

– Oh dear, don't say so. If there's something I can do, you can do it as well.

– No, it's not about whether I can do it or not. It's just that I want to strive as a blacksmith.

– Well, I used to be like that too..... Eiji, do you think I wanted to become a ruler from the very beginning?

At Nazioni's question, Eiji wanted to nod, but then, ceased that idea.

Nazioni had both a gallant personality and an appearance of a ruler.

If one was to ask this, no matter who they questioned, they all would most likely respond in the same way.

With Nazioni being a natural leader, there was no doubt his birth alone would determine him becoming a ruler.

.....Eiji thought this was so, but, was he wrong?

On the other hand, it was difficult to imagine Nazioni being made use of by somebody else.

It felt as though he could even snap at his superior, were the latter to pass down an untactful order, right.....?

It was much easier to imagine such a scenery, rather than Nazioni being employed.

Still, Nazioni denied as if being able to read between Eiji's lines.

– To begin with, I used to be part of this city's garrison. A long time ago, this place would flourish in trade between peddlers since it was a point that intersected west and east. Unlike other villages, this location would have a high demand for guards because there was no end to conflicts.

– Was that the case?

– Yeah. With this place being in the center of the war, we were really out of luck. Back then, there was no guy who would take matters into his own hands as a leader and unify this island. Because I was endorsed by others as the best candidate, I couldn't help but pick up the position as a ruler.

Were one to be subdued and terrified by Nazioni, nobody would try to oppose him.

Not to mention, Eiji could well understand how other villagers would rely on Nazioni, were a war to occur.

Even his size alone gave off a presence that made it easy to depend on him.

When they were surrounded by wolves, Philip was one of those who appeared to be very reliable.

Again, it seems to be a matter of charisma on the battlefield.

– That being the case, I started to rule, but it's not like I want to continue this job. I won't allow anyone to make me look important, but, neither do I want to give anyone instructions. If there's someone superior.... for example, if you, Eiji, are serious about developing this island on my behalf, I shall yield my position even today, without a moment of hesitation.

– Are you honestly saying that? No, I apologize, but...

– I couldn't be more honest.

Nazioni nodded down deeply.

His mouth reeked of alcohol, but, it didn't look like he would get drunk from 1 or 2 glasses of wine.

In other words, he was making his remark with a sober face.

Eiji couldn't quite imagine himself being in Nazioni's shoes.

That's because he was a happy man as long he could strive as a blacksmith.

Standing above others and leading a mass of people, it was too much of a burden.

– However, those doing their job half-heartedly are no good. Certainly, I understand I may not be a perfect ruler, but still, I'm the one who has built everything here from scratch. I wouldn't be able to stand all those endless brushes with enemies, were I to return back to those times.....My son may be doing his best, but, he's still can't be relied on.

– If memory serves me right, don't you have three sons?

– Yeah, and today you've become my fourth. I shall introduce you to them on some other occasion. Age wise, they're your younger brothers-in-law, so you should probably meet each other. Then, what's your decision? Will you retire and help me with management?

Nazoni asked with a stern face, however, Eiji shook his head from side to side without a moment of hesitation.

– As expected, it won't happen?

– I'm sorry.

– You don't have to apologize.

Haaa – Together with a single, deep sigh, Nazioni lightly dropped his shoulders.

However, in the next moment, he looked up with a refreshed face.

– Got it. Then it's fine for you not to retire. If you have any valuable knowledge, please share it with us, just like you do with your village.

– Understood. As long it's that much, I shall lend you my power.

– It may be a petty thing for you, but your knowledge is really precious for our side. I think I've already told you that.

It may be just like he said.

Eiji possessed nothing but skills and a knowledge inaccessible to this period.

Despite his knowledge being partial, its yielded result would be immeasurable.

– Oh, and let me tell you one more thing. Don't try to do anything

silly like causing a revolt. That's because we can easily suppress it without much effort.

– I won't do such things.

– Fun, I wonder about that. Judging from your response before, it sounded suspicious.

– Hahaha.....!

–Fuhaha!

Perhaps, Nazioni's words were on spot.

Among each human population, there's most likely half as many men capable of instigating a war.

The difference between both Nazioni and Eiji's sides was plain to see.

Were it to be a solo battle, there was probably no greater military force than that of Nazioni on the island.

Not to mention, Nazioni's soldiers had bronze-made equipment and were trained.

Were both sides to clash with each other, Eiji could imagine it being a one-sided massacre.

As one would expect, the difference in equipment greatly affected one's war potential.

The story would be different, were Eiji to gather iron-made weaponry, but...

However, it wasn't going to happen anytime soon. As expected, Eiji would rather avoid any fight if he could get away without any injury.

It was all the more reason for him not to do so, now that they both concluded their contract as a child and father, even if it was just temporary.

– Speaking of which, what kind of policy are you carrying inside your village right now?

– If it's recently, I wonder if it wouldn't be the newly established infirmary for childbirth. It's for the sake of increasing the number of children.

– What's the meaning of that?

– Look, isn't it that children and their mothers will fall into illness immediately after a birth? In order to solve that problem, the fastest and most efficient way is to choose a separate place for childbirth.

- Heh?! I see.
- And what's your current policy in this city?

At the time Nazioni nodded optimistically, Eiji asked back.

If he can hear more on Nazioni's policy, it will be possible for Eiji to figure out what his intention is and his further plans.

Eiji was even more curious about Nazioni's reply, since there were lots of things he had yet to grasp, such as why there were many residents discontent with Nazioni's reign.

– What we are carrying out are riparian works, as a countermeasure against possible floods, and saving food provisions for emergency cases, like famine. These are best things we can do right now, especially the latter. Because of that, we've been told that the taxes are too high, but, I believe people will understand the necessity of doing so once something bad occurs.

– If that's the case, why not encourage people to use hardy plants?

– What's that?

– One of the methods of lowering the risk of food shortage, even during a famine, is to grow plants other than wheat. Even if it's just a little, shouldn't it be better to encourage others with the use of potatoes, pumpkins, wild oats, barley, and for the livestock – turnips and clover?

– I shall adopt your idea as well. I guess, I'll have to discuss with Franko more on that matter. Is there anything else you can tell me?

– Anything else...

The talk with Nazioni was surprisingly lively.

For the sake of developing this island, Nazioni seemed to be quite flexible and positive in incorporating others' ideas. Actually, Eiji didn't know how many of his ideas would be adopted, but, he could tell that Nazioni himself was quite open-minded and forward-looking towards his ideas, which was probably a good sign.

Finally, as they had been talking constantly between each other, somebody knocked at the door.

Franko announced it was the time to conclude, and their talk broke up like that.

The same night. Being fully awake, Eiji looked up at the ceiling.

Nazoni didn't appear to be the person Eiji imagined him to be.
Franko also wasn't a particularly strict person.

Then, could one consider what they do rightful?

The fact that many people suffered due to Nazoni's policy wouldn't change.

Eiji had trouble with reaching the right conclusion.

The next day, it'd been decided a formal discussion would take place.

Invitations for the ceremony would be distributed throughout the island, and an information about the ruler taking the initiative would be spread.

The route leading to Siena would be blocked by snow during the winter. Therefore, it had been decided that preparations for the wedding and the wedding itself would be carried out after the thaw. Assuming Tanya would have her delivery by the end of the year, they still had enough time til their wedding.

And the problem of food shortage would also most likely reduce once they get through the winter.

Because people from the west would rarely socialize with the people from the east, it was quite convenient for Eiji to make a new contact and deepen relationship between both sides, as well as establish a new trade.

Their wedding would also become a great opportunity to promote things that are only available in Siena, such as iron-made products and alcohol.

As soon as he took care of other villagers and proceeded with the preparations for his return, Eiji left Nazoni's place in a hurry.

Since Tanya was in the end stage of her pregnancy, Eiji didn't want to prolong his trip and cause any further problems.

However, there were many villagers who were still occupied with storing offerings inside Nazoni's warehouse.

For that reason, it was decided Fernando would tag along with him on his return trip.

– Eiji-kun, are you done preparing?

- I'm done. How about Fernando-san?
- Yeah, I'm ready to depart at any time.
- Then, shall we go? I know I might be rushing you, but....
- One that fights and runs away may live to fight another day, or so they say.

Eiji looked around at the city of Nazioni.

Being able to observe the city, it had become much of a reference for him besides just the fact it was more advanced than Siena.

No matter how small a village was, each of them had their own good sides.

Walking through the streets leading to the exit, toward Siena, Eiji suddenly stopped after discovering a familiar face.

- What's the matter?
- Can I have you wait a little?
- I don't mind, but, is that person your acquaintance? That's fast, considering you've just arrived here.
- Yes, you could say so.

The person who entered his view was Katharina's father, Stephan.

His house was pretty much separated from here.

It must have been quite troublesome for Stephan to walk his all this distance by himself.

However, in exchange, they could hold a conversation without attracting public attention.

- It's been decided your daughter and I won't marry each other. In return, I think Dante, the son of Nazioni, will be the one to marry her.
- Is that so.....?
- Yes, but don't get me wrong. In the end, the marriage won't be of convenience but one that was decided by Dante himself.
- You mean it?
- Yes. Regardless of our jobs and positions, we were able to hold a very pleasant conversation.
- I feel at ease now....Thank you very much.
- No, I haven't done anything in particular. If there's someone to thank, it should be Dante.

Judging from Stephan's gloomy expression, one could imagine him

thinking about something unpleasant; nevertheless, it was wrong.

To begin with, Dante was genuinely in love with Katharina.

Despite him being young, Dante also had some flaws, but, didn't he handle Eiji's problem pretty well?

Even if he was to be bereaved of his right as a successor, Dante probably wouldn't involve himself in some sort of coup d'état, so Eiji thought he was the right choice.

The remaining problem would be Katharina's feelings about this.

Making decisions on his own.... Eiji probably feared returning back to the village.

– Please, continue to look after my daughter.

– Leave that to me. We shall meet once again during your daughter's wedding.

– Yes, undoubtedly.

Bowing down deeply, Stephan saw off Eiji and Fernando.

Not looking over his shoulders, Eiji continued to advance toward Siena.

Chapter 92 – The Name

- This is what Dante proposed by himself when we were discussing about you.
- Oh..... so it was Dante-kun, huh....?
- What.... Do you have any objections?

Eiji, who had returned to Siena, was explaining the details of his talk with Nazioni to Katharina.

Was it due to her reaction being quite different from what he had anticipated?

Katharina's astonishment was quite a big deal.

- Katharina-san, what do you think about Dante?
- Dante-kun? Hmm.... W, Well, I usually enjoy his company, but, you see, he's a son of the ruler-sama. I think he's a good boy with whom it's easy to get along with, still, hm... a marriage with him.....?
- Dante, I'm afraid to say this, but, seems like it will be difficult for you to be acknowledged despite your good intentions.
- Tche. Not like I'd care about that.
- Ah, it's not like I particularly against, you know?
- Isn't that great, Dante?
-Honestly, don't say things that are easily mixed up.

Yes, his reaction was enjoyable indeed.

Eiji too realized his urge of wanting to tease Dante despite not knowing when it had started,

With Dante's emotions showing through one after another, one could understand him being manipulated.

Dante's face looked pathetic, and his ears flushed red.

Certainly, he was feeling shy.

- There's no problem in regards to me, Dante, and his family. What's left is Katharina-san's decision.
- Is that soo....? Hey, Dante-kun.
- What?
- Are you fine being with me?
-It won't do as long as it's not you.

Dante's proposal sounded very manly.

Eiji, who had finally apologized and done his explanation, slowly returned back to his home while feeling at ease.

The smile coming from Tanya sitting next to him soothed his heart.

- Thank you for your hard work, Eiji-san.
- No, I was doubting myself for a moment how things would turn out, but, glad, it went accordingly to our plan.
- I too was wanted to see Dante's reaction.
- It was something worth seeing, you see.
- Ah, but I'm now assured. I knew Eiji-san is wonderful person, so you wouldn't let the matter with Katharina end up like that. I felt anxious thinking there would be 3 or 4 people joining our household.
- I'm not really that wonderful.

As soon as Eiji denied, Tanya shook her head from side to side strongly and obstinately.

Leaning forward with her body, she exclaimed with a strong tone:

- No, Eiji-san is by all means wonderful, and this is an opinion I won't yield on at any cost..... That's because this is the first time for me to fall in love with someone this much.
- T, Tanya-san....
- It sounds embarrassing, doesn't it....? But, these are my real thoughts. Just being together with you makes my heart feels nice and warm while beating fast.... I've always thought I must be a happy woman.

Eiji was momentarily captivated by the beauty coming from her gentle, smiling face.

Just a while ago, he was told that Tanya's childbirth would be expected in a few more days, judging from her appearance.

As one would expect, with Tanya's belly growing largely in size, she couldn't fully enjoy going outside.

Once Eiji placed a blanket on their shoulders, she snuggled up beside him inside.

- I wonder if it's a boy or girl that's inside Tanya-san's belly.
- I'm curious myself. I thought it would be nice if it was a boy, but...

- You mean it?
- Yes. Clearly, you would like to have a successor as fast as possible, right?
- Whether it's a boy or girl, I don't really mind. The most important thing for me is that Tanya-san can deliver it healthily.

Apparently, there was a high number of instances where children would die in their postnatal period.

Perhaps, it was due to the lack of a hygienic environment and surgical instruments that such things occurred, but, Eiji somehow wanted for both Tanya and her child to be safe.

The fact he made an effort to build a Seyakuin(1) and wanted to spread free medicine was solely due to his personal reasons.

Otherwise, nobody would potentially treat this problem as extremely urgent.

Today as well, Eiji insisted on cleaning and disinfecting their house.

- Have you thought about a name for our child?
- No, for some reason, nothing good comes to mind. Clearly, moments like this one will become of much inconvenience during the birth.
- As long it's a name Eiji-san thinks of for the child, shouldn't it be fine even if it sounds a bit strange?
- Still, it will reflect one's parental love.

Even among villagers, there were actually lots of names that sounded lukewarm.

Was it due to the low population of people on this island?

It didn't seem people here placed an emphasis on the matter of naming.

The reason why there are lots of common names, such as Tarou and Hanako in Japan, is most likely the same as this one.

There are also many examples of using names of occupations in one's full name.

In case of blacksmiths, their sons could be named as Smith, and their grandsons as Smith Jr.

- I was thinking about naming the child Liberto if it's a boy, and Verita if it's a girl.

- ‘Freedom’ and ‘Truth’? I believe they’re fine names. Surely, won’t the baby be glad when it learns about its name’s origin later?
- I want that to happen.
- Eiji-san.
- What?
- Right now, I am, unbelievably happy.

Tanya lightly brushed her belly while putting a gentle smile on her face.

Holding her arm, Eiji gazed at her with a serious expression.

By no means,

By no means, do I want to lose you. – Is what he thought.

– Eiji-san?

–No, it’s nothing.

Eiji bent his mouth in a strange way, trying to express his true intention, however, he couldn’t tell Tanya about his concerns.

*

And then, the anticipated day arrived few days later.

Even on that day, Eiji worked diligently like usual, focusing on smithing while instructing his disciples.

Eiji and everyone else entered their final stage before the winter suspension.

Therefore, it was natural for them to speed up and focus more on their duties.

Since there was one more thing Eiji wanted to make, he was especially pressed for time.

Just then, Mike arrived bringing some news.

Mike, who was out of breath from rushing to the workshop, stood at the entrance while trying to catch his breath.

– For you to be in such a rush, what’s the matter? Have you come up with a new method for hygiene?

– Idiot, that’s not the reason! Eiji, cease your work quickly. Tanya-san is going into labor.

- Eh?! Really?!
- Yes. That's why, hasten yourself.
- W, Wait a moment.

Eiji couldn't stop all of a sudden, since he was in the middle of forging.

Were he to do so, a precious piece of iron would go to waste.

Once he quickly interrupted his job, Eiji left a brief instruction to his disciples.

- Our work is done for today. When you close the furnace, make sure you've completely extinguished the fire. Pietro, please be in charge of wrapping up everything. I'm sorry but, I'll be going ahead.
- Understood. Hopefully, the baby will be delivered safely.
- It's alright. I've already told you there's time for worrying about that later.
- Truly, I want the baby to be safe and sound~.

Receiving best wishes from everyone, Eiji dashed out from the workshop.

Chapter 93 – The Birth (first part)

The interior of the Seyakuin was unusually warm once he passed through its entranceway. One could say that the air temperature changed with a whoosh the moment Eiji entered in from the outside. There was a lot of wood put on the fire inside the room's furnace, and the fire itself was burning brightly.

A kettle that was hanging up was releasing its steam, which probably served to maintain the right temperature and humidity.

A slender woman in her 30s was throwing more firewood inside the furnace.

She was the doctor inside Siena.

As soon as Tanya noticed the appearance of Eiji, she bowed down with a smile on her face.

Was she in quite a lot pain? Judging from those watching her, Tanya's smile seemed to be agonized and weak.

– Eiji-san..... I'm sorry you had to interrupt your work.

– What are you talking about? It's about our child being born, so please don't hold back. No matter what time or place it is, I shall rush to you.

– Hey, Eiji-san, won't you come and hold her hand? This girl should be less nervous if you're next to her.

– Understood.

There is a breathing technique applied during one's delivery, called Lamaze, however, Eiji wasn't very knowledgeable about it.

Because of that, he was unable to give them a proper advice.

Eiji feared he would reversely worsen the situation, were he to convey an incomplete knowledge.

He also knew well about various surgical instruments, but, it would be nice if he could learn a bit more on how to use them.

Perhaps, Eiji could've become more of a help had he possessed that knowledge.

The doctor from the Seyakuin placed a clean cloth given by Eiji next

to a bucket, in which there was warm water ready for the baby's first bath.

One hour had passed since Tanya started going into labor and the handling procedure had commenced.

– How's her condition?

– About this, I can only tell based on what the woman herself feels, you see. As long it's not their first childbirth, there've been lots of cases where women would deliver quickly and without difficulty, but, this is Tanya's first time.

– I see.

– It might take longer than what we think.

– Is that so.....? Is there something more I can do?

– There isn't.

Eiji became at a loss for words at this blunt reply.

But, don't take any offence. – The doctor said.

– To begin with, childbirth is what women take care of. No matter how much you're devoted to help, it's not a man's job to birth children, so there's no way for you to do it in our stead. When it's about helping out, women are more appropriate for the task, since they can understand the birthing woman's needs. That's why, will you just stay by Tanya's side while talking to her gently? If you can't do that, at least, leave this place and don't interrupt me.

– Understood. I won't become a nuisance.

– Good reply. Tanya, you've got a fine husband indeed.

The female doctor said so with a smile on her face.

Just as he was advised, Eiji sat next to Tanya while supporting her with words.

*

Much time had passed since then. It felt as though one was wandering inside a maze without ending.

Listening to the voice of agony, the time didn't seem to pass even slowly. For Tanya, who was enduring the pain, this was probably the longest day of her life.

- Uuuh.....! Fuuu....haa, uuuuuh....!
- Hey, do your best. You need to stay strong.

A screaming voice continued to leak out as Tanya clenched her teeth.

Putting all her strength into her body, once could describe Tanya's appearance as frantic.

Eiji was also holding himself back from shouting.

Tanya grabbed his right arm with a strength that could almost break it.

Was it due to her muscles? It was a considerable strength that made his bones creak.

Just where on earth do her thin arms get this much power? – Eiji thought curiously.

Just how much time had already passed?

It was supposedly noon by the time Eiji arrived, but, now it was completely dark outside.

It looked like the delivery took quite a while.

As the doctor kept urging her strongly, Tanya continued to strain her body with lots of effort.

- Hey, the head is coming out. We'll soon be there!
- Ahh....! Eiji-san.....! Eiji-san!
- Yes, it's here!
- Tanya! Look, it's here! It's a boy!
- Ah.... my baby....

As the doctor shouted noisily in joy, Tanya, who was out of breath, looked at her baby with caring eyes.

The delivered child was truly flushed in red.

It was strange for Eiji that such a child could grow hair after birth despite being this small

This is, my and Tanya-san's child.....?

It was a healthy looking boy.

The atmosphere turned silent for a while once the baby's navel thread was cut off.

It's said a baby doesn't breathe at first due to it being previously repressed in its mother's air cell.

The first sign of the baby's lung activity is when it starts to cry.

Please..... start to cry.

Please be healthy.....!

Eiji made an earnest wish while praying.

Finally, the baby began to cry.

At that instant, one could feel the tension in the air settling down.

Eiji spoke to the doctor, who was bathing the baby.

- It's a healthy sound of crying. With this, we can rest assured.
- Really, thank you for helping us throughout these many hours.
- You too did great in supporting Tanya. Well then, remember to praise her for her hard work as well.
- Yes.

Eiji bowed down toward the doctor and shifted his eyes to Tanya.

Her spirit must have been completely exhausted due to this unusually long childbirth.

Tanya seemed to be extremely tired, as one couldn't feel any sign of vitality on her face.

Still, once she was handed the baby by the doctor, Tanya embraced it with a cheerful expression.

- Tanya-san, you did well in giving birth to the baby.... Thank you, Thank you very much.
- I'm glad.... Eiji-san, please give this child a name.
- Yes.

Eiji clasped the baby timidly to his chest as Tanya held it out.

Somehow, the baby felt light.

With all those wrinkles on its body, the baby didn't appear to resemble its beautiful mother that much.

Its fingers were surprisingly tiny. No matter how skillful a carver was, he would probably be unable to recreate this part with such fine details.

However, this baby would grow up from now on.

- Thank you for being born. Your name shall be Liberto.
- Ah... I'm glad.....

Haaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa – Making such a sound,
Tanya's expression looked as though it was missing something.

Eiji held his breath.

Without thinking ahead, he drew close to Tanya and took her hand.

– T, Tanya-san?

– Eiji-san..... I am, just a little tired.....

– Tanya-san, are you okay?!

– I'll be resting for a while, so please..... take care of Liberto.

As Tanya's eyelids were slowly closing————

Her hand, to which Eiji held, turned heavy and lost all its strength.

Chapter 94 – The Birth (Last part)

Tanya's arm, which had become completely powerless, felt awfully heavy—

Eiji wanted to drop her hand unintentionally.

– Tanya-san.....? W, Wait a moment?

Eiji called out to Tanya timidly, but she wouldn't react. Her eyelids were closed, and they wouldn't twitch.

.....C, Could it be? No, that's impossible. Hasn't she been holding to my hand firmly all this time?

Still, that very same hand was now completely out of strength, placing more of a load on his.

A bad feeling rose inside Eiji.

He had heard that there were lots of cases in which a mother would run into problems despite her child being delivered healthy. Imagining the worst-case scenario, Eiji's face turned pale.

Thinking back, he understood that Tanya felt anxious when she last spoke.

Most likely, she anticipated something would happen.

Had he known this would happen, Eiji wouldn't have agreed with Tanya about making children, no matter how much she begged him.....

Without realizing it, tears began to gather in the corners of his eyes. Eiji couldn't see clearly, as his field of vision turned blurry.

Not even 2 years had passed since they met each other, but, his rich memories of their daily life started to gush out from inside him.

Eiji was filled with anger and regret.

No matter which memory it was, Tanya would always face him straightforwardly and express all her emotions.

For Eiji, they were precious and indispensable days.

Tanya-san.... Please forgive me.

If only I had been more decisive.....

– Hey, Tanya-san is sleeping from exhaustion, so don't just cry out of joy over there. Go back home.

–Yes? Sleeping?! So she's sleeping?!

– That's right. She had been enduring her delivery for many hours, so she's probably sleeping from exhaustion.

– That may be true, but.....*Sigh*.....

Good grief.....

He felt as if his body was sinking and dragging on from the loss of strength.

Tanya's heavy hand, which was still keeping its warmth was just motionless due to her sleeping.

Eiji made a mistake by jumping to conclusions.

No, rather, he was truly glad it just ended with him jumping to conclusions.

Checking his slightly irregular heart rate, Eiji sighed at once.

Indeed, she was one worrisome person.

Ehehe – Did she notice his sight? Tanya moved her lips as if smiling clumsily.

Seeing her somehow carefree expression, Eiji wanted to get angry at her as he continually poked at Tanya's cheeks.

Her face was warping and making a strange look. She seemed to be somewhat irritated.

Eiji felt a bit refreshed.

Honestly, thank you for your hard work. – He thought.

– Thank you for everything you have done today. Please continue to take care of Tanya and Liberto for the time being.

– Leave it to me. I've performed deliveries of many children who live here in this village, so I'll make sure they both become healthy, okay?

– Yes.

Eiji expressed his kind gratitude not just to Tanya, but also to the

doctor who moved around during the birth. After that, he left the place.

The doctor's words, filled with self-confidence, felt reliable to him.

*

Eiji headed toward Bona's house immediately after Liberto had been born.

It was already nighttime.

The surroundings were completely dark and the blowing wind was chilly, but, Eiji deemed it was probably better to relay the information about Tanya's delivery ending safely.

Bona wasn't present during the childbirth, however, she too must have been worried deep inside about her first great grandchild being born.

The house of the tribal chief was lit.

Apparently, being unable to sleep, she was waiting for the news.

The door opened soon after Eiji knocked on it.

– Oh, I've been waiting for you. You must be getting cold, so come in.

– Sorry for intruding.

–Then, how did it go?

– The delivery ended safely. Both for its mother and child.

– Is that so....?

Bona bent over as if collapsing right after listening to the news nervously.

Placing her hands on her laps, Bona somehow managed to remain on her feet while feeling relieved.

For Eiji, this experience was a first, however, for Bona, it was first birth after her granddaughter's 2nd marriage.

She probably held lots of expectation and concern for the delivery alone.

Being guided to his seat, Eiji received hot water and warmed himself.

His body was slowly warmed to its core, however, Eiji trembled without realizing it.

- Is it a boy? A girl?
- A boy. We've named him Liberto.
- As in 'freedom'.....?
- Yes. I want let children do what they like and live freely.
- For that to happen, we first need to create a world where it's possible.
- I guess you're right. Do you think it's difficult right now?
- Generally, everything is difficult. We are currently placed in a situation in which we can't be picky about what to eat for tomorrow.
- That's true.

Starting from eggs, Eiji had continued to improve foodstuff while incorporating various parts of his knowledge.

But it didn't just stop with that. With the 4 crop rotation system, which had been implemented using a part of existing fields, the amount of crops would certainly rise.

Perhaps, the number of livestock spared would too.

- Eiji, thank you for your hard work in Nazioni.
- In the end, it was decided I would become Nazioni's son-in-law.
- It probably went just as you had intended at first. You did well in making him swallow the bait. Then, what's your opinion on Nazioni?
- I'm not sure myself.
- What do you mean?

Seeing Bona's curious expression, Eiji began to explain.

- You could say that the reviews, which I had heard from everyone, and the impression given by Nazioni during our conversation don't hold water.....? Has anyone ever talked with Nazioni in person?
- I do. However, it doesn't look like anyone besides me has had the same chance. Everyone here, will mostly only come into contact with Franko.
- That's why, I was wondering if there isn't a misunderstanding in their opinions.

Umu – As soon as Bona groaned, she slowly began to ponder.
Eiji waited silently for her next words.

- I think I've got your point. You mean to say that everyone's

reaction toward Nazioni are actually meant for Franko, right?

– Yes.

– Still, it doesn't change the fact that Franko is merely Nazioni's servant who carries out his policy and gathers taxes.

– That's..... I guess you're right.

– Apart from being one's superior, that person should also be held responsible for his people's actions.

This time, it was Eiji's turn to groan.

Certainly, those standing above others should be prepared to suffer the consequences as well.

If that's the case, was Nazioni being misunderstood the result of his own mistake and misjudgment as a bureaucrat?

Nevertheless, Eiji believed that making an effort to understand oneself was of the same importance too.

If it was just a common villager, his officials couldn't care less about that person's interests, even if he begged.

However, Eiji was one of the executives in this village, and Bona was the tribal chief.

If they acted carelessly, they could most likely start a dispute without realizing it, as a result of one's misunderstanding.

– Although, collecting taxes seem to be a form of countermeasure against disasters and famine. If we plan to rebel without knowing things ahead of time, won't we suffer damage because of a small misunderstanding?

– Fumu, I think your concern is justified. We aren't making any rash decisions, but it's just as you say, it's better to put a more thorough consideration into how to deal with Nazioni, I guess..... However, we still need to be prepared to make our move at any time.

– In other words, we should continue to store up a food supply, arm ourselves, and build defense facilities?

– Yes. So as not to have Franko poke his nose into them, I think it's better to tell him they're intended for warding off wild animals as an argument.

– And there's still the wedding reception once we go through the winter, right?

– Back then, I was unable to hold a proper reception for you, so it's fine for you to enjoy this one to the fullest.

Bona stated that calmly.

She was most likely thinking so from the bottom of her heart.

– Some time has passed since my and Tanya's first ceremony, so it feels strange to me to have another one, you see.

– What? Being able to receive congratulations from everyone, shouldn't you be happy about that? Well then, go back to your home quickly. Tomorrow, I too shall check on Tanya and Liberto.

– I think you will be glad to see them.

Holding a lamp in her hand, Bona saw off Eiji to the entrance.

The light coming from her lamp dimly shone on the path at night.

With Tanya being absent, Eiji felt their house was spacious, calm, and a bit lonesome.

Credits

Author

(肥前文俊) Fumitoshi Hizen

Illustrator

Three

Translator

[Hachidori108](#)

Book designer

[Armaell](#)